

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Mischief, according to Francis Bacon, is the principal outcome of love in real life; and the mischief caused by love forms the theme of this novel.

The Paris family has been left poor by the sudden death of the eccentric musical genius who was their father; and Sagastrand, their large and rambling old family house by the sea, had to be sold. Twenty-one years later the eldest son, Gyp, having prospered sufficiently, bought the house back and turned it into a residential hotel, his main object, however, being to reassemble his family in the home that had been theirs, and to resolve their various problems.

By the same Author

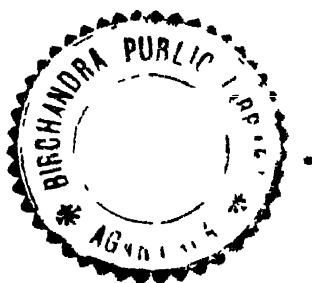
THE ALBATROSS

A CRY ASCENDING

by

David Langstone Bolt

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To
Eva and Richard
friends indeed

The Stage is more beholding to Love, than the Life of Man. For as to the Stage, Love is ever a matter of Comedies, and now and then of Tragedies: But in Life, it doth much mischief.

FRANCIS BACON

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CONTENTS

Part One	SAGASTRAND	3
Part Two	JONATHAN'S STORY	125
Part Three	EPILOGUE	181

PART ONE

Sagastrand

I

SCULPTURED cliffs and scalloped beaches swing in abruptly to the fishing harbour, the seas break white against jetty and wall. There is one street in Cravenmere. It follows closely the indented line of the coast, the inward sweep of the bay; it divides the greystone houses sharply into rank and rank. Inland are the farms, estates, nurseries; and at Croxton, in the shelter of the downs, industry. But at Cravenmere there is nothing but the fishing and the squat, weathered homes of those who live by it and the few shops to supply their everyday needs; so that visitors who come to swim off the rocks, who climb the green headland to paint the colours in the harbour, or leave a fearful trail of burned-out matches in the mouths of the caves below, return to Croxton at nightfall. From Croxton to Cravenmere the road slides down and down, the masts along the jetty seem taller than the houses; you see the gulls first, wheeling and drifting against the sky, then the masts, and the houses last of all.

Though the coast at this part is famed as a beauty-spot, the village itself has a bleak and a spartan look, without timber or thatch to recommend it to the sight-seer. Only by night is it pleasing, when its crescent of lights is a jewelled tiara, duplicated and magnified in the dark waters of the bay, and the few country houses along the cliffs, half-hidden by day among trees, now add the cheerful gleam of an upper window unshuttered.

Driving a new station wagon up to Croxton, Gyp

turned his head many times to look back at the lights. He drove slowly because in the twilight dimness the road was indistinct and because it was his nature to do nothing with haste; because, also, it was twenty-one years since last he had passed this way with leisure to observe it, and he found many landmarks. When the road swung left and began to climb he looked instinctively for the old beech tree on the lower slopes of the downs, and saw that it was gone. He thought at first that the oncoming darkness deceived him or that he had mistaken the place. He stopped the station wagon and stepped out on to the road. A fresh wind had sprung up from the sea, ruffling his hair and flicking the end of his tie in his face. He crossed the road and the grass on foot and searching about came upon the stump, sawn unevenly at two levels. The new power line came over the hill straight as an arrow from pylon to pylon to the farm. They must have cut through the trunk in sections, guiding the fall of it with ropes, or it would have struck the wires no matter how it fell. Part of the bole remained, a dark shadow aslant the broken ground, but the branches had been cleared. Roots by his foot still gripped the earth like a giant hand, retaining an adamantine grasp. It would take them days more, digging deep, to free the roots.

He touched the sawn stump with gentle fingers, exploring the rings that told the years of its life. When I was a child, this tree was already old.

Old beyond the memory of any man or woman in the valley—old, it had seemed to him then, beyond the reckoning of it. It had stood apart, rising in the manner of a sentinel out of the chalky soil as if it stood guardian over the valley down to the sea. In winter curiously smooth and naked, landmark against a dull sky; but he

remembered it in summer: when as a child flying in sport from his companions he had climbed the hillside running, and stumbled into its dark shade. He had remained there so long, staring up in wonder into foliage dappled with the sun, that he forgot his purpose and was deaf to the shouts of those who sought him; and they, growing bored, left him undiscovered.

Before the road came, the tree grew there: before the cottages were planned, when the valley was young and the wheatfields newly turned; when there were few buildings in that part of the downs, a frost-rimed cart-track down to Cravenmere, Craven Mere, the harbour a simple inlet, Croxton a village.

Tracing the rings of the stump he lost the count and withdrew his hand, thinking that here was a tiny part of himself destroyed.

It was dark when he returned to the station wagon. The street lights were a loose chain thrown over the hill. The road curled right and left, now between the trees whose branches thrashed about in the wind, leaves whisked along the tarmac, scattered by the wheels. The road dropped down, bearing right. A car went past him in the same direction and he watched the red tail-lamp wink itself out into the distance. And then, a moment later, he saw her.

The forward thrust of his headlights had taken up with a movement on the grass verge, a scarlet fluttering in deep shadow between two street lamps. He saw her, but so briefly that he was past before his impressions took shape: a red coat swinging free as she walked, shaken out by the wind; something dangling, loosely held in one hand; fair hair gilded in the extreme limit of the headlights' travelling arc, which left her the next instant far behind and in darkness.

His natural reaction was to drive on, disregarding the questions which sprang from that flash of scarlet imperfectly glimpsed, blocking the well-spring of curiosity with the firm reflection that it was none of his affair. She had given no sign, no signal as he passed, she had not turned her head. There would be no more buses, there were no houses here, nowhere where she might turn off. It was an odd and a lonely place for a woman to walk alone, but she had given no signal—it was none of his affair.

A logical, satisfactory conclusion, and against it no argument save the voice in his head.

First, the darkness and the wind singing in it. A line of street lights studding the night, curling away as the road goes, a wide road, incandescent, dark-edged. Splashes of light under the lamps, and in between them black shadows. And in the shadows a woman in a red coat walking, carrying her shoes in her hand . . .

He had gone on perhaps a quarter of a mile before he stopped. He drew in well to the side of the road, filled his pipe and lit it, a slow and deliberate sequence of actions. He wound down the window and looked back. The wind scattered sparks from his pipe over the road, but there was no sign of her. The wind went rippling through the grasses, a living creature, cruel and malevolent, unseen and vicious, hunting down those who like the woman walked abroad. He looked for her under the street lamps, but there was nothing. He withdrew his head and waited, wishing one moment that she would hurry; the next that she would somehow not come at all. Barefoot—it was true: she had been carrying her shoes in her hand.

She came out of the night as suddenly as before. In

the noise of the wind and because she went in her stockinged feet upon grass he did not hear her approach. She walked steadily, unhurriedly, her head bowed, and would have gone by but he threw open the door and shouted to her.

Her footsteps faltered, checked in their stride. He thought a shiver passed through her—not of alarm, not of surprise even. It was as though she awoke from a dream unwillingly, and made the small movement of waking to recall a wandering spirit. She seemed to hesitate, debating with herself. He saw the white of her face as she turned her head. Her voice was faint and hostile, reluctant to acknowledge his kindness or suspicious of it. "It's all right." But she spoke well. K.E., the family said, meaning the King's English. Still she hesitated.

Holding the door open between them he shouted to make her hear. "Where are you going?"

The question seemed to puzzle her. She seemed uncertain herself where it was that she was going. He repeated the question, cupping his hands over his mouth, and she answered: "Croxtown"; but she made no move to enter the station wagon. She stood with the satin shoes in her hand, the red coat restless in the wind showing now and then black lace on satin beneath. He guessed at her thoughts and felt an impulse to laugh. Instead, he reached back and switched on the inside light so that she might see his face.

By the same light, he saw hers.

Had he turned then and driven on he would afterwards have been unable to describe her except as the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. For she was beautiful.

There are manifold interpretations of the word; none

bears analysis. For him, simply, the claim of this child was certain.

Child—yet her beauty transcended the meaning of age; it asserted the brief eternity imagined in the translucent running of a stream, which is for ever changing and seems never to change; but her years could not have been more than eighteen. This he saw, and more: his little light reached her, but not beyond her, illuminating a small face hooded by the night, teased by the golden-spun hair blown fine as a spider's web across a temple almost transparent in its pallor. Why these things should make her beautiful, he could not have said. Her beauty surprised and confused him as a brilliant light surprises and confuses; and like a brilliant light, masking its elements.

From Croxton to Cravenmere the road slides down and down, the masts along the jetty seem taller than the houses. She had gone that way in a green sports car driven by a young man with fair hair; the gulls first, wheeling and drifting against the sky, then the masts, and the houses last of all. She had said: The road goes through, then? and the young man had looked slantingly at her, amused.

"You don't trust me in the least, do you?"

"Oh," she said. "Implicitly."

They were losing speed and she thought: in a moment, when he finds a place, he will stop. Aloud she said: "The dance was at the Marine, you said."

Gradually the car came to a halt on grass under swaying trees. The harbour was below them, fading with the daylight, losing detail. The young man took his arm from her shoulders to make the handbrake secure. "You are fond of dancing?"

"I like it, yes."

She was composed, hands in her lap. Because he meant to take care in what he said he looked at her hands, not her face. Her hands were pale against the scarlet cloth of her coat. He asked her: "What are you thinking of?" because he was afraid that she would put the question to him, and he did not know how to answer it.

She looked at him, surprised. The corners of her mouth lifted, trembling, but she did not smile. Except with her eyes, which had a lilt to them, like a song, like a brook; too swift with the thoughts to be read. God, he thought. Oh, God. But she knows her worth to a penny. Don't you, my sweet?

"I was thinking," she said, "that we shall be late for the dance." And she added: "If there is a dance."

This pleased him, he understood this. He said with more confidence: "And if there isn't?"

"You had better drive me home again, hadn't you?"

His arm lifted to circle her shoulders again, but she leaned forward a little and rejected the embrace, offering neither provocation nor anger.

"Lucia," he said, pleading, or feigning to plead.

"Lucia . . ."

She said nothing. She sat there beside him, waiting and not minding, as though she would have sat there all evening saying nothing, waiting and not minding. Then a gull passed low over the car and she said: "Oh, look. It's got black feet," as if this was important. She strained round to watch the gull's flight.

To catch her attention he found cigarettes and held them out to her. He lit hers, searching her face before the flame died. "There is a dance. I was only teasing you of course."

She said: "Of course."

"But there's no hurry. We're early as a matter of fact."

"Are we? I wish I'd known. I had a terrible job getting ready in time."

There was no way that he knew of answering this in words. His hand fell to hers, a brown hawk to a lamb, shifted, and was at once snatched away with a cry of pain. His hand to his mouth, soothing the burn, he looked down in startled anger on the glowing end of her cigarette.

"Oh," she said. "Did I burn you? I'm so sorry."

He laughed to cover his anger. He pronounced her name in the Italian manner: Luchia, Santa Lucia. "You don't seem to like me very much."

"No!—I like you very much. And now—please . . . may we go?"

He had switched off the ignition and now he tossed the key in the palm of his hand. "I'll make a bargain with you."

"No."

"I haven't told you what my bargain is."

"I'm very bad at bargaining," Lucia told him. "I'm always cheated in the market—it's no use."

"Perhaps the truth is, you don't care for men at all?"

He laid the slightest possible stress on one of the words; it was almost imperceptible; but she caught it at once, and laughed.

"Ah—I understand. And a moment ago you said I was a saint!"

She is making a fool of me, he thought.

He took the cigarette from her fingers and tossed it through the open window and caught hold of her wrist; in play, but hard; laughing, but with real anger. When

she resisted him he turned her wrist viciously, still with the pretence of a jest, so that she must bend towards him to save herself pain. He held her so. "And now what will you do?" Seeing that her face was brought so close to his own, he kissed her on the mouth. And now what will you do?

Her free hand was a small hard fist that took him in the throat, choking him. From surprise, he released her. More humiliating than the blow were the instant tears that stung his eyes because of it. They blurred his vision, he did not see her go. The door opened and closed on her side and he was alone, the mark of her fist reddening to a flush under his chin.

She heard the car start up and glanced back to see if he meant to turn and follow her. But he drove on, gathering speed and down to the harbour lights. Solemnly she waved him farewell, and in the private darkness the corners of her mouth lifted. With mock-sadness she said aloud: "Good-bye!" and went on up the road, back towards Croxton. She walked quickly, avoiding the shadows and peopling them with her imagination, but the wind drove her from the exposed crown of the road. The ditches and hollows watched her; the blackness under hedge and tree moved and changed shape as the wind bowed branch and leaf. A car passed her and another, and then she was grateful for the shadows, for the drivers did not notice her, and she was disinclined to accept a ride in a stranger's car. Her feet began to pain her, and soon hurt intolerably, and she took off her high-heeled shoes and carried them. Perhaps, she thought, I could cut off my hair.

She had spoken no more than the truth to the young man. She had in truth liked him, she had thought him different from the rest. She had liked him, or else there

would be no need for regret. And in the end he was no different from the rest after all, and that was something else to be sorry for. Not for him. For me.

She became aware that someone was calling: a voice that entered her thoughts and distracted them, too much a part of the wind to startle her; she could have imagined it louder than that, and perhaps she had. She hesitated, uncertain which way to turn. And then, collecting her thoughts, she saw that a station wagon was drawn up at the side of the road and the door thrown open and someone leaning across. Mistrusting the open door she answered: "It's all right"—but her bruised feet were slow to move on.

"Where are you going?"

Home, she supposed. But she did not care to return to her father's house so soon after she had left it; nor to admit that her father had been right about the young man and she had been wrong.

"Where are you going?" the man in the station wagon called a second time.

"Croxtton."

She would go to Bossie's flat, and then later Bossie would take her home; there would be no need for him to come right to the door. Bossie would be in his studio at this hour, probably; and probably there would be one or two of his innumerable friends there, poking at his canvasses, vaguely critical. Bossie had talent and money, more money than talent, and Lucia had never doubted to which he owed his popularity. She had told Bossie and he had not minded. He had said it was something they had in common, for she had more beauty than wit. And then he was sorry, because all at once she was crying, and unable to tell him why. He had never seen Lucia cry before, and he made a sketch of her

crying, and she tore it up. It was a pity she tore it up, it was one of the best he had ever done of her. He had wanted to use it for an oil, with a fringed shawl and an open window, and he said he had meant it for Tennyson's *Mariana*, which showed that he had not the least idea what it was she was crying about.

The interior of the station wagon was suffused suddenly with a pale light. The man had twisted round and turned a switch somewhere inside. When he turned back, Lucia saw his face for the first time.

She thought herself deceived by the voice, she had thought him younger than this. Then she saw that it was the hair, not the voice, which was deceptive.

His hair, springing aside from the division of the parting in crisp, natural waves, had the colour and something of the texture of new iron, and no more than a suggestion that it had once been black. But the lines in his face which should have been many were few, and his dark eyes appraised her with a liquid directness not found in middle age. Apart from the contradiction between hair and features his face was unremarkable, and she was reassured, as strangers were always reassured on first encountering Gyp, both by its strength and its guilelessness. He stared at her, but she was accustomed to being stared at. She saw the strike of her beauty plainly recorded in his face, and the struggle there, as if he would have turned aside if he could. She thought he looked a little silly, but kind, like a dog awaiting a reprimand.

Gyp had been too often likened to a Labrador dog to question the truth of the similarity, and he accepted it as he accepted unalterable things—without resentment. The knowledge that this girl made the same comparison

to herself did not trouble him. He went round and held the door for her until she had drawn the skirts of the scarlet coat in after her, and smoothed them. And then he was afraid that she would think he did this because she was beautiful, not because he always did it. He started the engine awkwardly, holding the brake because of the hill. They moved off, climbing up under the street lamps.

Seated beside him, Lucia stooped to replace her shoes—with care, for her feet ached abominably. She said over her shoulder: "I'm grateful. It's very kind of you."

"I saw you walking," Gyp answered, "and I thought . . ." But he did not know what he had thought. No explanation for her had occurred to him.

"I missed my bus," she said.

By an hour then, at least. It was more than an hour since the last bus had come up from Cravenmere.

"No," she said, looking at him, "that won't do. I suppose I should explain."

"There's no need."

"Oh, but I must—or you will think the worst of me. I don't make a habit of wandering about the roads at night."

"No, I'm sure . . ."

But now the laughter that seemed to lurk behind everything she said was plainly audible and held his apology in check. He was seldom at ease in the company of strangers. His unambiguous directness denied him the useful front of sophistication; the sociable run of platitudes, the shallow, swift-flowing stream of wit and flattery, irony and insult. When curbed from a consideration of politeness, it rendered him inarticulate. And this was particularly true where the strangers were

women, who, he had observed, were apt to use words more freely to conceal a thought than to express it. For, of course, eighteen had been an absurd guess at her age.

She laughed softly. "No, I was on my way to a dance. In a car with a very insistent young man. We had a disagreement and I got out. It was all very unfortunate!"

She was reminded, then, how powerful he was. A certain change in the grip of his hands on the steering wheel drew her attention to the set of his wrists, and in turn to the fact that though he sat squarely, watching the road, his shoulders encroached on to her seat. He answered without turning his head:

"You seem a very determined young lady."

"Very! So determined that he accused me of being a Lesbian . . . Well, I couldn't have that."

To shock him, he supposed, she said that; to avoid his sympathy she invited his disapproval of her. She was watching with amusement for the effect of the word. They had reached the highest point of the downs. The chain of lights dipped and lifted and fell again, veering right.

"Croxtan," Gyp said, for the town was visible as a yellow glow in the sky before them. She nodded.

"Yes. I always think it looks as if it's on fire."

He asked her name. Lucia, she told him, and asked him his; and because Gyp was such a suitable name for a Labrador they both laughed.

"Geoffrey Yeo Paris," Gyp explained. "It's the initials you see."

"Paris?" She tried the sound of it, teased by a memory. "Of course! Paris, Paris. That was the name of the people"—she half turned with a gesture back towards the sea—"at Sagastrand. That's the big house on the cliffs—I expect you saw it—with the tower."

Gyp said smiling: "They are there now."

"Oh, no," she corrected him. "This was years and years ago. When I was a demure little girl in pigtails."

It was ridiculously easy to imagine. He looked at her then; not sideways or out of the corner of his eye but full at her. It was easy to imagine, but though he searched his memory he could not place her. Her smile teased him.

"Do I look a freak? It's the wind, I expect."

She tried to tidy her hair, and he turned back to the road and the lights of Croxton.

"It's strange," he said slowly, "that I should have forgotten you." He could not believe that he had. "And yet I don't remember you at all."

"No; why should you?"

He told her, then, that he was the eldest of the Paris children up at Sagastrand so many years before; he had lived his childhood out among these downs. Oh, she said swiftly, but Sagastrand had been much too grand for her, she had never been up to the house. But she knew someone who had. His name was Cromwell.

Gyp remembered the name, not the circumstances or the man himself. A farmer or a tenant perhaps. Or perhaps, teasing him, she was lying. But she must have been very young, and would have seemed to his adolescence a baby.

"The house was sold," she remembered, "long before the war. Mr Klein bought it; I used to know his son."

And sold again, he told her, when Klein went to America; and a third time not a month ago, when he himself had bought it.

Lucia said in surprise: "You bought it back?"

"Does that seem very strange?"

"Oh, no! It's just that I didn't think people lived in houses like that in the atomic age."

He said gently: "Like that . . .?"

They were entering the suburbs of Croxton, houses drawing in together closer and closer, the hard brilliance of shop windows and street lights swimming up again from the road, confusing the eye and calling for undivided attention.

"It's very big," Lucia said.

"We are a big family."

"You are married?"

Traffic-lights held them. He brought the station wagon to a standstill. Because of the quietening of the engine, his voice sounded unnaturally loud.

"No," he said, "I am not married. A mother, brother and two sisters. But we are turning it into a hotel." The lights were green, and he said: "Which way now?"

She gave him directions and they swung left. There was little traffic at this hour. "I hope I'm not taking you out of your way."

He told her that he was in no hurry. He was meeting one of his sisters on a very early morning train and preferred to spend the night in Croxton.

He had booked a room at a hotel at the end of the town opposite that to which she was taking him, but he did not tell her that.

Following her directions he drove through the main shopping area and up a wide traffic lane that climbed to the residential area. She showed him where to stop; at a tall white block of flats a hundred yards from the main road. He drove her to the main doorway.

She took his hand quickly between both her own.

"Dear Gyp . . . it was sweet of you. And . . . *thank you.*"

He wanted to ask whether he would see her again, but her *thank you* was spoken, he knew, in gratitude because he had not.

“Good-night, Lucia.”

The scarlet coat vanished between glass doors before he could say more than that. The doors swung back after her, back and forth, and became still and blank.

He drove slowly back through the town to his hotel, parked the station wagon and took the lift up to his room. He unpacked the few things that he would need from his suitcase and took off his jacket and tie. He took a sheet of the hotel notepaper and seated at the table by the window began to make a list of the things which he would buy in Croxton in the morning.

His room was high up. The broad street below was swept by the wind: the branches of a tree opposite thrashed about, a scrap of paper whisked along the pavement. Neon cinema lights were bright on the street; lights climbed up, wherever he looked—up to the little hills, thronged and thronged with houses, suburban. He could not tell, among so many lights, which thread in all that glittering embroidery was made by the street lights climbing up past the block of flats where she lived.

WHEN she pressed the door-bell it did not ring, so she knew that Bossie was alone in his flat. He had long ago found a way of disconnecting the wiring when he was at work, and this was meant to ensure that he was not disturbed. But, in fact, his friends had quickly discovered the ruse, and since he never remembered to slip the latch on the door, invariably walked in just the same. A few, like Lucia, rang the bell only to ascertain whether he was alone, and more than once Bossie or one of his guests had answered the door and found the passage empty. But she listened for the bell now and it did not ring, so she walked in. There was a short passage passing between bedrooms and kitchenette, leading directly into a comfortable living-room. Through this was another door giving on to a covered-in verandah which Bossie had made his studio. This door was ajar, and she could hear Bossie moving about beyond it.

"Come in!" he shouted irritably. "Come in. Doctor Barnardo's Home. The ever-open door. The sherry's on the sideboard, cigarettes on the table." Then he saw who it was and looked pleased. "Hello, Lucy."

He wiped his hands on a turpentine-soaked rag whose smell pervaded the whole room, ran his short, spatulate fingers through pale-ginger hair in indecision, then cleared a chair by taking his jacket and throwing it on the floor. He wore a very old khaki smock which made him look more like a greengrocer than an artist. His blunt, freckled face had a look of concern for a moment,

as it always had when a visitor entered the studio, briefly apologetic for the untidiness. With most visitors this was a fleeting gesture, but with Lucia he was apt to overdo it. She limped round the easel with eyebrows delicately raised.

"Oh! This is nice, Bossie. What is it—another atom bomb going off on a beach?"

Bossie's *Garden of Eden*, a six-foot by four-foot oil depicting an atomic explosion on a beach strewn with the bones of prehistoric animals, had achieved a sort of extravagant notoriety. It had been widely and unkindly criticised—more or less seriously, because he had priced it at a hundred and fifty guineas. Not the least remarkable thing about it was that it was painted entirely in varying shades of green. There was a very complicated reason for this, but, although Lucia had heard the explanation so many times that she could have quoted it almost word for word, she had never really understood it. *Garden of Eden*—or, as it was more generally called, *The Chlorophyll Bomb*—was never sold. Bossie in the end came to speak of it as a "magnificent failure", and it was stacked with a number of other magnificent failures in a corner of the studio, collecting dust.

The picture on the easel was not a picture at all, merely a square of beaver-board which Bossie had not yet finished covering with a coat of orange as a base, because the texture of beaver-board showed through oils applied direct.

"Yes," Bossie said. "I'm thinking of calling it *Moment of Impact*."

"Or you could give it a collar and tie," Lucia suggested, considering it, "and call it *Self-Portrait*."

Pleased by this fancy she studied it more closely and pointed out to him the eyes, and an ear, and a place



where the paint had run down which would do very well for a nose. Bossie tried to answer and exploded into noisy laughter. To oblige her, he took up palette and brush and won her quick laughter by the absurd caricature that he made. Presently tiring of this, she went into the living-room for sherry. Watching her go, he said: "Hurt your foot?"

She called back: "My horse broke down."

It was a moment before Bossie understood her. Then he asked: "Was it a green horse?"

"Green, yes." She came back, sipping from a bulbous glass held cupped in both her hands. "Mmm, Santilado." She made a circle of forefinger and thumb, touched the polished pink nails to her lips and tossed a bubble kiss delicately into the air. "Ver—ry nice."

"You don't mean to say you *walked* back?"

"I told you," she said with her secret smile. "My horse broke down." She was turning over some canvasses which she had not previously seen: beech trees in autumn, a group of rickety farm buildings, a rocky stretch of coastline. "Is this Cravenmcre?"

"I thought I heard a car," Bossie said, "all the same."

"That was somebody else's horse. I like these Italian sketches, Bossie—it is Italy, isn't it? When you were over there? I like the funny little boats. And the bridges. It looks just like the operas. Is it like the operas, Bossie?"

"No," he said. "Tell me——"

"Is this one Venice? Venice at night! What is it like at night, Bossie?"

He said angrily: "Dark."

She looked hurt, sliding the canvasses back against the wall. "Now you're cross."

Bossie continued to cover the beaver-board with

orange paint, looking very cross indeed. But when he glanced over his shoulder and met her expression—now showing exaggerated contrition—he smiled ruefully. Presently he asked: “Was he nice?—the one who brought you back.”

“Oh, very nice. But you always said I had nice taste, didn’t you.”

“I’m nice taste,” Bossie said obstinately. He put his brush down and advanced towards her in a determined manner. He took her quite gently by the shoulders and she introduced her glass in between his mouth and hers, her eyes laughing at him over the rim.

“Sherry?”

“Lucy, you’re heartless.”

“Are you looking for it in my bosom? Or on my sleeve?”

Bossie released her. He said hopelessly: “It’s no use talking to you.”

“No use,” she agreed.

He picked his jacket up from the floor; for no reason except that he wanted something to do with his hands. He said without optimism, rather pathetically: “Why can’t you be nice to me, Lucy?”

“I am being nice to you.”

But she said this in a flat, hard voice with no humour. He was surprised into staring at her; she turned and moved to the window, and in another voice complained of a draught, and busied herself with the window-latch and the curtains; and parting the curtains a little said: “It’s pretty, isn’t it—the way the lights go down the hill,” and he knew that the moment and whatever meaning it held had gone by him. It was as if a mask had slipped and had been instantly adjusted. He was embarrassed without knowing why. It was as if he had

turned a corner and come upon her naked; although, in fact, this would have embarrassed him less. "Penny," she said briefly, and went through to the bathroom.

When she came back he was sketching. He put the block aside at once, but she took it and put it back in his hands. "Or I shall think I'm disturbing you."

He said frankly: "You do disturb me."

"Oh . . ." She pouted in disappointment. "Then I shan't be able to come here any more." He opened his mouth to argue and she said: "We agreed, Bossie."

"Yes."

He went back to his pencil-sketching. Lucia found a box of cigarettes on the window-sill. She passed one to Bossie, which he took abstractedly, and lit another for herself. She settled herself comfortably on the chair so that she could watch him. She possessed the gift of absolute tranquillity in repose, sitting perfectly still and yet contriving to look neither bored nor in need of distraction. She did not drum her fingers or tap her foot, as Bossie did, nor consume her cigarette in fierce little puffs, as Bossie consumed his. Presently he appeared to finish the sketch or to tire of it. He threw it aside and asked her how long she was staying.

"As long as you like. I'm supposed to be at a dance."

"Oh."

"And then you can be sweet and drive me home."

"All right." Bossie looked uncertainly about him, suffering an unsatisfactory mood of creative energy not channelled—desiring to create a masterpiece not formulated even in his imagination and lacking the patience to consider how he should begin. In these driving moods he sometimes felt that he wanted to take a new canvas and let some divine agent guide his brush. He had once tried this, but it had not been a success. He had used

the canvas again afterwards, painting over it a windmill which he had sold for fifteen guineas. "If you're staying," he said, "will you pose?"

"If you like."

"Nude."

"No."

"Damn," he said; and then: "Well, just the head will do. I can use Hazel's body."

"But I don't want Hazel's body!"

And in truth, she did not. Hazel was a professional model, Bossie's favourite. She had a magnificent figure, but on a scale altogether too grand for Lucia's small head. Bossie was roaming the studio restlessly, turning the pictures that were stacked against the walls or merely piled from the floor. He took an unfinished portrait and set it up doubtfully on the easel. It was of a very unattractive woman in her late forties. After a moment, Lucia recognised it. "It's the Malley woman!" She considered it. "Oh, Bossie, it's really very good."

"Too good," Bossie agreed morosely.

"She won't like it."

"She certainly won't."

"Take one of the chins out."

"I have."

Lucia laughed. "Poor Bossie! Well, lift the chin a bit. Like this." She jumped up and sprang into a natural pose, and held it, her small pointed chin tilted up exactly in imitation of the portrait.

"Hold that!" Bossie shouted. "Don't move an inch!"

He rushed in a flurry for his paints, whipped round to the portrait and at once began to alter it, breathing heavily through his nose. Lucia remained like a statue. He forgot her as a woman. She was clay or marble, a wonderful model, better even than Hazel, and Hazel

was good. Bossie had never found a model to equal Lucia in her absolute immobility. Her expression did not change a shade.

"All right," he said at last. "You can relax."

She dropped back on to her chair. He turned the easel and showed her.

"Better?"

"Much."

It was no longer the Malley woman's chin. But it was undeniably a great deal more attractive.

"God," Bossie said. "I don't know why I do this."

But he went on with it, calling Lucia to pose this way and that, altering the lamp so that the light fell upon her as it fell in the painting. He worked for the most part in silence, speaking only when he wished her to move or turn. Half an hour went by before he was satisfied and permitted her to rest again. Then, cleaning off the palette with turps, he remarked: "So the boy with the green car is out?"

"Out," Lucia said. "We parted on a jarring note."

"And the one who brought you here?"

Lucia's mouth lifted at the corners. "Oh, nice. He has grey hair like a shaggy dog. He lives in the castle on the cliffs at Cravenmere."

Bossie said: "You like him?"

"Oh, yes! He's *sweet*."

"Sweet," Bossie said. "That's all right, then."

3

SHE was not in the least like Gyp. Her face was narrow, tapering to a pointed chin, so that the swift curve and sudden flight of dark eyebrows gave her sometimes a puckish look, sometimes an air of secret tragedy. Her eyes were too restless to betray her, darting aside from enquiry, avoiding a question. A silken scarf like a miniature sash was looped over her black hair and knotted behind, the ends loose over one shoulder. Her hair was short and curled thickly close to her head, there was no need of the scarf. She had worn it because she did not care to pass through London without a hat. The platform was busy with people. She greeted Gyp with remote affection, a chaste kiss placed beside his mouth. Hello, Gyp. Barbara. His smile went past her to the empty carriage, fading to surprise.

"And Kay?"

"Did you think I was bringing her down with me? No. She's at school, she's boarding now."

"And you're leaving her there?"

"For the time being," Barbara said. Gyp had picked up one of her suitcases and she took it from him. "I've masses of stuff in the guard's van. We'll never get hold of a porter and the train goes through." Then, as if she had not previously realised this, she said urgently: "Please hurry!" and looked round in panic for the slamming of the doors and the whistle and the flag.

Gyp went off at once, but without haste; her panic he left with her. Though there seemed to be no porters

he found one who was disengaged. Before the train moved out Barbara's luggage had been counted and checked on to a trolley, and was already being wheeled out to the station wagon. Barbara found Gyp again outside paying the porter. She met him with a crooked smile, half grateful, half dubious, the puckish look. "I'm not used to this, you know."

Gyp said seriously: "No, I suppose you must find it strange without a man to arrange these things."

"My husband never did. No, I meant before that."

Gyp said nothing. He drove through the town to the traffic-lights and turned right on to the Cravenmere road. Though she sat back and showed no enthusiasm, Barbara's head turned again and again to follow some point of the country back as they passed it.

"I am the last to come down," she said presently. "The others are already installed?"

"Except Jonathan," Gyp told her. "He will be down for Christmas."

Barbara nodded. "And has it changed?"

"Sagastrand?" he said. "No, the house hasn't changed much."

"But we have—is that what you mean?"

"I don't think I meant anything in particular."

For a time neither spoke. Though they had always met frequently and once shared much of themselves, the interlude of Barbara's marriage stood between and divided them. He had learned to think of her as a wife and the mother of Kay; and afterwards as his sister. There were many things to say now, many things that might have been said, all beginning with the formula: Do you remember? Do you remember Harlequin the tortoiseshell kitten, and how we greased the legs of the table where his box was in the shed, in case the rats came in

the night, and they did come and climbed up all the same and little Harlequin killed three? Do you remember the time Jonathan stood on a dead limb and fell from the beech tree? Do you remember the year of the snows when there was tobogganing on the downs? Do you remember fishing off the rocks? Do you remember?

It was Barbara who broke the long silence.

"They say you should never go back."

"Because we were happy?"

"It's never the same," Barbara said obstinately. "One only remembers the nice things." She watched the changing contours of the downs, hill sliding behind hill as her viewpoint altered. The road took them into a tunnel of trees and the downs were eclipsed. "Besides, we were children."

Gyp said gently: "You're afraid of being happy, is that it?"

Now she laughed. "Yes, perhaps that's it."

"Why?"

"Because there's a price. Always. And—spiritually, I suppose, I'm broke. I can't afford that sort of currency any more." And covering the lapse with a platitude she said: "Anyway, you can't put the clock back, old boy."

Gyp said: "I haven't tried."

But he thought that perhaps he had.

The twisted scroll beneath the stag's head, *resurgam*, the family arms and motto. Twenty-one years ago Paris had died leaving a wife and four children, the great house, and staggering debts. His youngest child, Penelope, was two when he died, the others much older: Gyp thirteen, Jonathan twelve, Barbara nine. Their recollections of him, though vivid, were imperfect and unconnected; it was not possible to separate what they remembered from what they had been told. Paris had

been known to so many people, there were so many colourful stories told of him, that to his children he assumed improbable proportions and became half mythical. Only the good die young, but this was difficult to believe. Heart failure they said, because it sounded a nicer thing to die of than coronary thrombosis—and more fitting to their father's prolonged lapses into pre-occupied and melancholy indolence, and the sudden and violent outbursts of energy with which they were interspersed; which sent him flying up to the tower room and filled the halls and corridors of Sagastrand with the sound of the piano. A persistent, nagging, and in truth rather beautiful theme constantly repeated with unending variations—unending, for there was never any conclusion save the same crashing discord that told the family he had lost patience and temper, and prepared them for the ill-humour that followed. The stormy moods that ended at last with the silence unbroken in the tower room, when he died abruptly from heart failure or coronary thrombosis or perhaps from some wild frustration of the spirit beyond the analysis of his doctors. It had been Gyp who found him there. He had gone down to his mother to tell her. Father's sick. But he knew he was not sick, he was dead. He tried to remember now, driving down in the sun towards the blue sea, with Barbara silent beside him, what his own reactions had been. But though he was able to picture the scene again, the house thrown into confusion, a great many people hurrying here and there on errands the purpose of which he could not now imagine, his childhood self was absent from the picture. But he remembered that he had wept privately, and that a migraine headache had kept him confined two days in a darkened room; and that when, days later, Jonathan had struck

up a chord and played on the dusty piano, he had run up and beaten him with his fists until he cried. But he could not remember why he had done this.

A name came to him—Cromwell, Cromwell.

A small face, hooded by the night, teased by the golden-spun hair, the laughter that seemed to lurk behind everything she said, perhaps, teasing him, she was lying.

I never went up to the house, but I know someone who did. His name was Cromwell.

Cromwell; it was Cromwell who came up to the house and made order out of chaos. Cromwell who had sold Sagastrand to Klein, who did not want it, for a price Klein did not want to pay; more than its worth in a falling market. Cromwell who had met Paris's creditors and slashed their demands and paid them from the sale of the house. Cromwell—broad and thick in his striped blue suit and tight white collar; black shoes mirror-polished striding from room to room; heavy-featured, handsome, his flaxen hair brushed flat and trim. The children had disliked him for his bullying joviality, for the burr in his speech. But it is strange, Gyp thought, that I should have forgotten his name.

There had remained sufficient to complete their education, for Jonathan's music and Gyp's accountancy training; sufficient to send them out one by one well-dressed and well-spoken to find their own level.

And each of them, in his or her own way, had failed.

They had been happy at Sagastrand, though they did not for many years know this. We were children, Barbara said, but it was not because they were children that they had been happy. Because, rather, they had known their world and their relation to it. They had been like

shoots cut from a tree and grafted into other orchards, other worlds; never merging, never mixing, retaining an alien scent and hue. They had been happy once at Sagastrand because without explaining or understanding it they had sensed a purpose in their lives; not their purpose; the purpose of some Paris who in the seventeenth century had built the house.

You can't put the clock back, old boy.
I haven't tried.

The twisted scroll beneath the stag's head, *resurgam*, I shall rise again. Perhaps he had tried to put the clock back.

The road went on down through sunshine and now at last Sagastrand was visible far off, high on the cliffs, the sun glinting on the many angles of the roof, the sunrays flashing like a heliograph from a window of the tower. Perhaps remembering that this would be Jonathan's room when he came, Barbara said: "You've been seeing a lot of Jonathan, haven't you."

"Yes. We've kept in touch pretty closely."

"Your letters have been full of him."

"Have they?" Gyp said. "I expect it's because I've been worried about him."

"Yes, naturally."

He felt that she studied him, but when he turned his head her gaze fled to the open window.

Presently she asked: "Was it your idea or Jonathan's? —to turn the house into a hotel."

"Mine," Gyp told her. "Jonathan said it was like setting a carnival in a graveyard."

She smiled at this or her thoughts. "So now you have brought us all down here again. Mother and Penny, and now me. Charity, Gyp. No one will thank you for it. No one ever does."

They turned off before Cravenmere, taking the road along the coast.

"There's no reason," Gyp reminded her, "for anyone to feel grateful to me. Everyone will be expected to do their share, I told you that."

"Yes," Barbara agreed, "you told me. Only I didn't stop to think at the time how utterly absurd it was. Of what conceivable use shall we be in the running of a hotel—any of us?"

He began to list the family patiently. Their mother, to begin with, had a flair for catering; she had been known for it once.

Barbara conceded this, and asked humorously: "She will do the cooking, then?"

"She will supervise the catering."

"How pretty that sounds! And means nothing. And Penelope? Oh, of course, I forgot. Penny is a shorthand typist, hundreds and hundreds of words a minute. Useful in the office if you don't mind checking everything she does five times and then doing it yourself. And Jon? Not so easy. What are you going to do with a double D.F.C., a War Hero who's——"

Gyp cried out urgently: "Barbara!"

The station wagon lost speed abruptly so that Barbara was jolted forward, and had to put a hand on the dashboard to steady herself. Gyp's face in that moment frightened her. She thought that he would stop, but he drove on. She put up a hand nervously to the scarf in her hair and, without meaning to, loosened it, so that it slipped off behind. They passed a child, running back towards the village. The child ran with a swinging, dancing step beside the ditch, little hands swinging unclenched, heeding only those objects so close that they must be avoided, wrapped in some immediate, impor-

tant fancy. Barbara said, "I'm sorry," but it was for him that she apologised, because of the change in his face. I have been worried about Jonathan, he had said, but he should have said *distressed*. *I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: . . . thy love to me was wonderful, . . .* She was compelled by Gyp's silence to speak again. "One must"—she tried to make it impersonal—"one must be realistic, after all. There were many who lost their lives in the war."

"Some," Gyp said, "more than their lives."

But she would not accept this. "You mean it is better to lose your life than your sight?"

"Not mine. Or yours. Jonathan's—yes."

"Because of his music?"

Gyp quickly pointed out to her the chimneys of the house through the trees.

"And what shall *I* do there?" she asked him, and he smiled.

"You will be very useful. You have a genius for getting along with difficult people."

"Yes. I have my divorce to prove it."

Stone pillars on either side of the carriage-way had the name etched in the square facing. *Saga* one said, burying the word in lichen. The other had been newly scraped clean to read: *Sagastrand*, and beneath this was affixed an oblong board with the legend: *Residential Hotel*. The house was a mass of grey stone through the trees.

Because of the trees they did not see the green car until it was almost upon them. It came from the direction of the house, and came whipping through the trees so that the sight and sound of it came at the same moment. Gyp pulled in to the side and then, because he was obliged to, to avoid an accident, stopped altogether. It was a long, green sports car driven by a young man

with fair hair who waved recklessly to Gyp and shouted something, a greeting perhaps. And beside the young man was Penelope, the younger of Gyp's sisters, who neither shouted nor waved but stared in front of her as if she had not seen him. They shot between the pillars and dropped out of sight below the gradient.

Barbara looked to Gyp in question, but he said nothing, only shook his head as if it were of no consequence. Then he said: "He is one of the guests," although this had not been her question at all.

"I forgot to ask," Barbara said, "how many there are."

"Three."

As they drove on, the carriage-way was full of shadows, now light and dappled under the branches, now suddenly blocked out by the house itself, a broad and deep shadow that reminded Barbara of a fantastic mailed fist—the blunt chimneys for knuckles, the tower a thick finger across their path.

"Three isn't very many, is it."

"It's a start," Gyp said.

He drove in under the porch and went to open Barbara's door. She stared about her.

"It hasn't changed," she said, and her restless glance included the shadow printed on the drive, and the distant grey-slate roofs of Cravenmere far below. "Except that it looks bigger. That's funny, isn't it? You'd think it would look smaller, coming back as an adult. But it doesn't, it looks bigger."

He stood waiting.

Lingering, she said: "Why is that, do you suppose?"

But he could not tell her. He pushed open the front door and stood aside for her to pass. "There will be some breakfast in the morning-room. Don't wait for me. You

are in your old room." And then he said: "Is anything the matter?" because she had been about to come in past him and had stopped at the words and turned her head away.

But she was laughing, laughing.

"Oh, Gyp! Don't you see how absurd it is! 'You are in your old room'—you talk as if it was yesterday! Twenty years ago, Gyp, twenty-one years." And she stopped laughing and felt suddenly old, the secret tragedy.

Gyp did not follow her into the house. He rang the bell, and a woman's head came round the half-open door with a startled: "*Bitte?*" Seeing him standing there alone she showed herself uncertainly—a woman in her thirties in a clean white overall, the sleeves rolled back over plump biceps, dark-haired, dark-eyed, her skin dark against the white overall. "*Entschuldige . . .* the bell rings."

It rings, Gyp said in German; but not for you, Hille. Gill or one of the maids must answer the door. Your place is in the kitchen.

The rebuke in English would have touched off a spark of temper, would have made her instantly sullen or angry; but because he spoke gently and in German, teasing her with her own lapse, she clapped a hand to her mouth, aghast at her mistake. She looked at the station wagon and the luggage, and said carefully: "Missus Connor has arrived."

"Yes, Hille, my sister is here."

He sent her to tell Gill, smiling, when she had gone off, to imagine how complicated the simple message would become in repetition. Hille was capable, when she took pains, of a curiously pure, concise English—heard among certain Scots people—which could not be

misunderstood. But the porter Gill, perhaps deliberately, confused her. He cycled up each morning from the harbour village bringing with him a tang of fish that lingered as much in his speech as in his clothes. Because she could not understand him, Hille supposed herself at fault. She tried to get the fish into her own English. And when he laughed at her she fell back upon her native German and swore at him, which was what Gill wanted her to do. He liked the rich vehemence of the words she used, and privately practised them for circulation among his village friends. What bond or sympathy united these two—the Austrian cook and the nineteen-year-old Cravenmere boy—Gyp never understood, not suspecting that it was their love of himself.

He did not wait for Gill to come. The boy would find Barbara's luggage and take it up to her room without further instructions. Gyp lit his pipe and strolled slowly past the house, over the sloping grass and down to the edge of the cliffs, delaying his appearance at the breakfast table because his mother had been eagerly awaiting Barbara's arrival, and the women would have much to say to each other that would be more easily said in his absence.

Though he had been living at Sagastrand for three weeks and had been a frequent visitor for months before, the house and its alterations had occupied all his time. Before today he had not even been into Croxton, for the London road went another way along the coast. Now, pacing the springy turf above the cliffs, he began to consider the provisions he would make for Jonathan's arrival. The cliffs, for one thing. For a quarter of a mile the cliffs were the only boundary to their land. Part of the way they dropped down to the sands in terraces, and there was a zigzag path down that way. Further along the cliffs fell sheer, and their precipice had been

barred by a strong fence, but much of this had gone down with the turf at the edge. A long strip turned sideways like a railway line and plunged out of sight; some of this might be reclaimed and brought in several feet. But much must be replaced before Jonathan came. He walked back until he found the path down, and remembering that this was the only direct approach to the beach, he went down it a little way until he could see the whole descent, considering whether steps could be laid inside a hand-rail. A discarded cigarette packet showed that the path was still in use, either from the hotel or, more likely, from below by visitors from Croxton. Wandering tracks in the sand below, criss-crossing, told him that already several had come out, taking advantage of the warm weather. He shut his eyes tightly, trying to feel what a blind man must feel on the cliff: the change, perhaps, in the breezes off the sea, lifted up against the cliff wall; the restless, continuous to and fro of the sea and the breaking on the rocks. But as he stood there with his eyes shut, drawing thoughtfully on his pipe, he knew that it was an empty charade that he played, and that these things would not be the same to Jonathan. He opened his eyes and began to climb up again and then, glancing for the last time down at the shore, halted in sudden shock.

Someone was walking back along the sands, half a mile away. He saw the scarlet coat tugged by the breeze fluttering open. He hesitated and climbed a little higher on the path and stopped again. He took his pipe from his mouth and paused to knock it out against his shoe. A man and a woman came out from the cliffs below where he was standing; hidden from him, until this moment, by a shoulder of rock. They waved to the girl and she waved back. And then, as she drew closer, Gyp saw that the coat was not scarlet but a deeper red,

and her hair was short and a light brown. He filled his pipe again from an old leather pouch and lit it carefully within the hollow of his hands. When he was satisfied that it was drawing properly, he made his way back to the house.

Elizabeth Paris stood at the window in the morning-room privately watching for him, and saw him come up over the cliffs where the path was. She said to Barbara: "He's coming." Barbara jumped up from the table in a hurry and put the back of her hand against a silver coffee-pot, and looked worried because it was barely warm. She said, half in astonishment at herself: "I'd forgotten Gyp!"

But Elizabeth showed no astonishment at all. She was another Barbara, tall-looking against the window, the sun behind her, whose brightness made her seem insubstantial; Barbara a generation advanced, her colour faded, her sound muted. She wore a smooth tweed skirt and shaped cardigan that would have fitted either of them, but though the clothes suited her, she wore them with none of her daughter's elegance. A sleeve was rucked, a wisp of grey hair awry. She had Barbara's look, but not her range of expression.

"Gyp is so easily forgotten," she said. "It's almost a knack of his."

Barbara awarded this a smile. "That's really rather clever of you, Liza. It's quite profound." But she said this reproachfully, as if profundity were to be avoided. They had been talking of other things: of Barbara's ex-husband, and of Kay and of finding a school for her in Croxton, and of money. A good deal about money, and with a sort of free-masonry not common to those who have always had money, nor to those who have never had money, but reserved for those who have had it and

lost it and discovered its significance. Once it had been a subject of indelicacy for open discussion, like Do 'you say your prayers at night? or somebody's table manners. But with Gyp's approach Barbara was reminded of other questions to be asked before he came in to them. She said quickly: "He was doing well in London."

"Yes, very well." Elizabeth spoke, as usual, rather vaguely. Even the most straightforward things she said sounded inconclusive and open to correction. "I always said he would do well. Because he's level-headed."

"I think he's barmy. Throwing up a position that would see him in clover for the rest of his life; security, no strings, no ties, nothing. His friends, his flat— Oh, Liza, did you see his flat—and for what?"

"He's very keen on the hotel," Elizabeth said. "He's worked terribly hard at it, getting the alterations finished. There weren't enough bathrooms. Apparently there's a law about it, so many people to a bathroom. I didn't know, but Gyp knew. And the kitchens wouldn't do at all for a large number of people. Then there was the heating, and the office—you'd be surprised how much there was to be done."

"Yes, but why?"

Gyp came past the window and waved to them through the glass.

"Why?" Elizabeth said. The question bewildered her a little. She cast about for a reason. "I don't know *why*. You mean why did Gyp buy Sagastrand in the first place? Well, I suppose he wanted to. I thought it was a nice idea. I never really thought about *why*. I don't suppose Gyp did either."

"That's not very level-headed of him, is it? I mean, chucking fifteen or twenty thousand pounds down the drain without thinking about it first."

Gyp, coming in through double doors from the hall,

stopped in surprise and took the pipe out of his mouth and wanted to know who was throwing all the money about.

"Football pools," Barbara said glibly. "All the time. I'm afraid your breakfast is stone cold."

Elizabeth rang for fresh coffee and toast, and, presently, when these appeared, took Barbara up to her room. "On the second floor, you remember? We're all on the second floor; Penelope's opposite you, Gyp at the end of the same corridor and I'm next to Gyp. We're keeping the best rooms for the guests." They went together up one of the twin staircases that joined like a wishbone, or a spur bent over, the single flight rising back between the double. But the tower room, Barbara remembered, had been the best room of all, their father's.

"When Jonathan comes he will be in the tower room, won't he?" she asked.

"Yes. Gyp thought it would be better, because it has a door by itself. It might be confusing on the main floors, so many doors and all alike. One doesn't think of these things——"

"But Gyp did," Barbara remarked, "didn't he?"

Gyp spent the afternoon out on the cliffs with twine and wooden stakes marking off the line where the fence would run. He had decided to make a new fence entirely, uprooting the remains of the old one. Later he would order wooden palings from Croxton, and, with Gill's assistance, make the fence himself. A rustic fence, he thought, the palings driven in at an angle, criss-cross, because it was the easiest way and it would not need to be strong. When he had the twine secure, close to the ground, he paced off the length of it. Then he began to calculate how close together the palings would need to

be, how many palings would be wanted. He was still doing this when his younger sister Penelope came out to him.

The carriage-way lay on the opposite side of the house. Preoccupied with the work, he had not heard the green car return. He glanced up and saw Penelope approaching, marching over the turf with dramatic purpose, as if she meant to walk, a martyr, off the cliffs. He looked up and she tossed her head. Her hair was longer and lighter than Barbara's and the sunshine put lights in it; but her eyebrows were darker than the hair and drawn together in concentration and defiance, an effort of will; the bow of her mouth was angry. She wore a loose raglan coat, her hands thrust deep in the pockets. Gyp noted these things in the one glance. Then he looked down and went on with his calculations, and did not look up again until Penelope stood before him.

"Hello," he said.

"Tea is ready."

Her message delivered, she stood waiting, and he was reminded of a dog on a leash. She waited, he knew, for his rebuke, for recriminations. He straightened unhurriedly, arching his back to get the stiffness out of it. He asked her whether she had seen Barbara and she said yes, and was silent.

"I'm putting up a new fence," Gyp said, and he indicated the run of twine over the grass. "Wooden palings in at a slant, a sort of lattice idea. And then creosote or something, not painted. Shouldn't look too bad, should it?"

"I went out for a drive with Shaun," Penelope said.

Gyp nodded, gathering the spare twine. "Yes, I saw you."

She waited, but he added nothing to this.

"Well——?" she challenged him. "Aren't you going to say anything?"

"You are of age. You can come and go as you please, Penny."

This infuriated her; it was the argument she had rehearsed to defend herself. I'm over twenty-one. I suppose I can take an afternoon off without asking permission?

"Don't excite yourself, Penny," Gyp said quietly. "Nobody minds your running off. We're not busy at the moment."

"No—it's him you don't like. Shaun."

"I've told you I don't like Shaun."

"Yes, and I've told him."

Gyp blinked at her. He was unwilling for a moment to believe that he had understood her correctly.

"You told Shaun that I disliked him?" he asked. "That I *said* I disliked him?"

"Yes, I did! You ought to have the courage to tell him to his face!"

"It would be a sorry world," Gyp pointed out, "if we were obliged to tell people to their faces whether we liked them or not."

Walking back to the house beside him, Penelope lost something of her rebelliousness. It was not easy to rebel against Gyp or even to argue with him for long, he had a habit of taking down the targets before you fired.

"I know Shaun's not perfect," she said sadly, "but I do love him so. I know he's got a lot of faults, but it doesn't matter a bit. If you ever love anyone that way, Gyp, you'll know what I mean." And before he could speak she added confidently: "But you never will, of course. You're not the type."

"Not the type," Gyp repeated.

"No. You're too much of a gentleman."

SHAUN had been the first guest at Sagastrand. He was on long leave from Kenya, where he was assistant manager on a stock farm, and, tiring of London, had travelled south to visit friends at no great distance from Cravenmere. He had taken a room for the week-end, and stayed on. Next had come the Churchmans, a civil engineer on permanent transfer to Croxton who had brought his wife to the coast and would stay until they found a place to buy. The day following Barbara's arrival a retired naval officer and his wife came on the recommendation of the Croxton agents, and might stay permanently if it suited them. Three days later another couple arrived in a new Jaguar, and these Gyp turned away.

He announced this casually at luncheon, in answer to a question from his mother. Penelope had been singing the praises of Shaun's car, and this reminded Elizabeth that she had seen the Jaguar under the porch earlier in the morning.

He had explained, Gyp said, that the conversion was not yet completed; explained that only a limited number of rooms was in use for guests; regretted that none was available.

There was a moment of dumbfounded silence, for they all knew this to be untrue.

"But there are six rooms," Barbara cried, "that are completely ready!"

"Not K.E.," Penelope suggested with her mouth full.

"Oh, is that important," Barbara said, "with a Jaguar?"

"Can we afford to be particular?" Elizabeth wondered.

They debated it among themselves, all talking at once except Gyp, who said nothing at all. He went quietly on with his luncheon, content to let Penelope's first assumption pass unchallenged. But at last, when they had all condemned him in turn for turning guests away on the grounds of snobbery, they challenged him outright, and he admitted that this was not the reason. They had been well spoken, Gyp said, the man in his thirties, the woman younger, attractive, shy in her manner. Altogether a nice couple, but not married.

Penelope thought this romantic and said so, adding with swift curiosity: "Did they say so?" She was startled and intrigued for an answer.

Barbara was also moved, but to indignation, and for another reason. But her question was the same: "How do you know?"

Gyp did not want to talk about it, but when they pressed him answered briefly. The man's case had been pigskin, hers cheap fibre; the man spoke for her, not seeking her opinion or approval; when they spoke together they spoke without the use of names. There were many ways of telling. Penelope discovered a flaw in this.

"But they might have been a honeymoon couple."

"I think not."

"No," Elizabeth said. "You can always tell honeymooners."

"How?" Penelope asked, but no one told her how.

They kept the silence while the dishes were cleared by a maid and the next course brought in. As soon as the maid had gone Barbara burst out: "I think it's

incredible! If they were well spoken—so long as people behave themselves——”

Gyp raised his head and his eyebrows in enquiry and checked her rapid speech. But she went on.

“——Oh, you may think I have queer ideas about behaving oneself! But if they don't interfere with other people, why pry into their private affairs? What right have you to make yourself judge and jury?”

Gyp considered this for a moment, putting down his spoon and fork. He said cautiously: “Well, I suppose you may think me old fashioned——”

“I think you're narrow-minded!”

“Barbara, please,” Elizabeth said. “Gyp's quite right, it's not a question of being narrow-minded or broad-minded, it's the hotel. You know Commander and Mrs Cox are thinking of staying permanently, we don't want to risk offending them for the sake of a couple who come for the week-end. Do we?”

The high colour went slowly out of Barbara's face, leaving her very pale. Her eyes went to each of them in turn: her mother appealing, her forehead wrinkled as if she were trying to discover some defect in her own logic, waiting for someone else to take up the conversation and permit her withdrawal; Penelope, eyes on her plate but her ears pricked, finding high drama here; Gyp, plodding through his meal with unconcern. Barbara said: “I seem to have spoken out of turn.” She stood up, sliding her chair carefully back to the table. “Sorry, Gyp.”

She went out, and after a moment Elizabeth followed with some private consolation. Penelope was noisy with her cutlery, and catching Gyp's eye, grinned.

“You see?” she said. “I told you.”

“I know,” Gyp said, “I know. Too much of a

gentleman." But he did not smile when she did at the joke.

Barbara is unsettled, he wrote to Jonathan that evening, I blame myself for not understanding sooner. She says so little it is easy to be deceived, to underestimate the nature of the strain which this past year has imposed upon her. But now and again a chance word reaches back into the past in which she lives, taking another meaning, another sense for her. Through a glass darkly, but then face to face. She seldom speaks of Kay, and Kay is all her life now. But I am hoping that the peace of the house itself will bring her back to us, the sea air will do her good, I'm sure. Most of all I hope that you, when you come, will be able to speak to her as we cannot, and that . . .

He did not pursue the thought but finished the letter in conventional phrases, remembering that it would be read aloud by a third person.

Thursday was market day in Croxton. Because it was necessary for Gyp to be in the hotel with the workmen supervising the alterations, Elizabeth had formed the habit of taking the station wagon into the town on Thursdays for the week's supplies. But a week after Barbara's arrival, hand-basins had been fitted in the last of the guest rooms, electric-light fittings tested, electric fires installed and the last of the workmen gone. Whatever alterations remained to be done, Gyp and Gill would do themselves. And on the Thursday, Gyp went into Croxton alone.

He drove through the town to a sprawling timber factory on the north side, walked in through sawdust and shavings and spoke to a man in overalls. Together they went round the factory and with a folding ruler measured up various wooden stakes and palings. When Gyp had made his selection and it was noted down, the

man scratched his head thoughtfully. "If it's those you want, Mr Paris, we've enough in store here, I dare say. I can have them ready by"—he plucked his lower lip, calculating—"three, say; or half-past."

"I'll call back then," Gyp said, "after three."

He went back into Croxton with Elizabeth's list and was busy for two hours, driving from the market to the main shops. By eleven he had finished and went back to the factory. "Two o'clock," the foreman said, "at the earliest. But perhaps you could leave your van here, Mr Paris? And we'll have it all loaded and ready."

Gyp left the station wagon and went back on foot, strolling without haste, following the crowds window-shopping along the high street. He wandered into the museum and the new art gallery, and walked through the departmental stores and the bookshops. As he walked he thought of Jonathan and asked himself how clear a picture of the house his brother would carry in his mind after twenty years, whether he would remember the way from room to room, up and down; and he thought of Barbara and her divorce, and of Kay, and of what they should do for a playmate for the child. But mostly, he thought of Lucia.

He did not know at first. He thought that he walked the streets of the town at random only, looking at faces because he always looked at faces, not looking for the one. But when he found himself at the road which led directly to the white block of flats—high up, and more than a mile from the main shopping centre—he knew that neither accident nor chance had brought him here.

He was alarmed, suddenly, that she might in truth be behind one of these windows and see him. He turned back and began to walk briskly down towards the shops again, assuming a false purpose in his stride in real fear

that passers-by watched him with amusement, knowing him for a man who goes walking the streets to look for a girl.

Not liking this picture of himself, he dismissed it as untrue and absurd.

He went a little way down the hill, and a double-decker bus went by him. He looked up to see if she were in the bus, and, though he did not see her, he quickly turned his head aside as if he were looking at something else.

And because the action was false he thought that it must be obviously false, and that anyone watching him must know it was false.

And then he began to think that, after all, she had been in the bus and had seen him.

He became at once self-conscious, so that he seemed to betray himself no matter what he did.

He stopped.

It was true then; without knowing it, he had been looking for her. He had not crossed an intersection without looking down all the roads to see if she was there. He had glanced into the cars that passed, expecting to see her seated beside another man. He had looked over his shoulder in case she was somewhere in the crowd behind. And now, wherever he went, he had the thought that she was watching him, and that she knew.

He caught a bus into the town. When he got off he bought a newspaper and studied the front page as he walked, because this is the sort of thing a man does when there is nothing in particular on his mind. As he went into the hotel it began to rain.

He went into the cloak-room. There was a tall, white table with a brush and comb and, above the table, held to the wall by two round-headed screws, a mirror. He

caught sight of his own face as he passed, and he paused. He began to tidy his hair and saw, with a sense of relief, that it was the same face, like a Labrador. The same liquid gaze concealing, it seemed, nothing. He combed his hair with his own comb, straightened his collar, squared the knot of his tie. His reflection was ridiculously neat—complacent, unruffled by the turmoil of his thoughts. No one would know. No one could guess. In the street he had turned back, and now in his mind, too, he turned back: in imagination coming once more up the road from Cravenmere where the beech tree had been, searching the shadows for the red coat, as if that might somehow explain the absurdity of his actions. He tried to recall the mockery of the small face with the secret smile that had turned towards him in the station wagon. The picture came so swiftly and so vividly that he knew he had carried it since that moment in his mind. Yet it explained nothing. From time to time there had come into his life this woman or that who had claimed his affection: a wistful smile touching an unexplained sympathy in him; a certain charm of manner that pleased; a way with children or old people; a vivacity in one, a tristful melancholy in another. But there was nothing in his experience to match this. There was no explanation, he thought, except to say that there had been something between them more than between strangers. Something glimpsed and veiled, recognised and dissembled. And then the innate teaching of a society that threw up a wall and made a mystery between a man and a woman, Adam's rib. Yet if I had seen her before, he thought, as she said, no matter how long ago, I should never have forgotten her. Never.

And yet I knew her.

And then it struck him that this was the common-

place rationalisation of a man attracted to a woman, and he was at once astonished and ashamed. He said aloud to the empty room: "I am behaving like a boy of seventeen." He supposed that it was true; though he had never gone walking the streets to look for a girl at seventeen, or ever until now. And then he laughed.

He took his newspaper and went upstairs to the restaurant on the first floor. He took a table by the window and ordered luncheon.

When he had finished, and coffee and his bill were brought, he remembered that there was writing paper and envelopes in the pocket of his coat, slung over the back of his chair. He had collected it this morning, a thick pad embossed with the address for hotel use. With another hour to wait before the palings would be ready, he broke open the packet and took a sheet for a letter to Jonathan. He began to write quickly, and his coffee, on the table at his elbow, grew cold.

You will say that I am in love with this child, but that isn't true either. I wanted desperately to see her again, but it was a sort of anger. I wanted to discover some flaw, vanity, or the trivial use to which she puts her beauty. It would be easy, she would need wings to equal my image of her! But of course I didn't know. Not even that I was looking for her. This is for your amusement only, a needless confession because it is over. I no longer want to spoil my illusions, I prefer to believe that such a woman might exist. I am glad, for this reason alone, that I shall never see her again.

And then, glancing down through the window, he saw her in the street.

The letter was crushed into his pocket, pen and coat snatched up with the bill. When he came out into the street Lucia was the distance of a block ahead of him.

She was in yellow : a yellow, belted raincoat buttoned against the rain, but with the collar demurely folded down ; a trim little yellow cap, like those worn by the first Elizabethans, sitting neatly at the back of her head above the loose knot of yellow hair. Gyp compelled himself to slow his pace lest she turn and see his urgency. He touched her arm and said: "Lucia."

She turned her head quickly in bright surprise. Her eyebrows went up and her mouth smiled. She said: "Well, hello!" with a curious intonation that made him think she must have been forewarned of the encounter; that she had perhaps seen his approach mirrored in one of the shop windows. He touched her arm again briefly to cross the street as the traffic lights changed, looking at the traffic, not at her.

"I want to talk to you, Lucia."

"Yes . . .?"

She did not seem in the least surprised now. She paused, smiling, when they arrived at the opposite kerb, waiting for him to tell her what it was he wanted to talk about. As though she could not for the world imagine what it might be, and yet found the request perfectly natural. Two young men in tailored blazers and slim-cut slacks walking abreast separated them. The eyes of the young men slanted to Lucia as they passed; their chatter broke off for a moment. Impatiently, because of the people, Gyp said: "Come and have a drink."

"I can't now."

"For a moment only."

"I'm sorry."

And she was sorry, or seemed to be. She began to walk on, not hurrying away from him, nor inviting him to walk with her, merely walking on because she must

and could not delay any longer. Gyp kept pace with her. He had come up behind, she must believe that his way lay in the same direction as hers. But she did not question his right to accompany her. She fell into conversation at once, as if they were old friends. She asked: "How is your hotel going?" and he made some reply. She was as trim as a model in a fashion parade, unself-conscious as a uniformed schoolgirl, swinging along beside him with a free step, taking pleasure in the light rain and the freshness of it, ready to smile or laugh, tossing curious questions at him one after another, attentive to his answers. It was easy to talk to her; difficult to say anything. Gyp was telling her how he meant to make safe the steps down to the beach, for Jonathan, when the thought that in a moment she must turn aside and leave him filled him with panic. Lucia said: "I dreamed about you."

He answered carefully: "Did you? What did you dream?"

"Oh. . .!" She tried to recollect the dream, as something of small importance—or of no importance at all. "It was a funny sort of dream. Muddled. I was sitting in a landing, a sort of nook halfway up very narrow stairs that went round under themselves. On a wooden chest with a brass lock; I remember the lock very well. And . . . then you came down the stairs from above and I thought you were going past. But you turned round and saw me."

Gyp waited for her to continue. They walked a little way in silence. He asked: "And then?"

She said lightly: "No, that's all there was. Dreams are like that, aren't they? But it's funny, I don't ever remember seeing stairs quite like that, that go round under themselves."

"There is a flight of stairs in Sagastrand very much like those you describe. Up to the tower room."

"Is there?" she said. "I don't know. I've never been inside Sagastrand."

"You might come one day."

"Yes, it's a hotel, isn't it."

And she added, full of dreary old people; and Gyp agreed, some of the people were undoubtedly old. And dreary, she insisted; and Gyp said yes, he supposed some of them were dreary too. But not all, she said smiling at him; and he said no, not all. She halted. He took another involuntary pace, checked himself and returned to her side.

"My bus goes from here," she said. "Here it is now."

It was upon them, slowing to the kerb. Lucia took her place in the line of people moving towards the platform.

"I should like very much," Gyp said uncertainly, "to see you again."

She made no answer, but smiled as before.

"We could have lunch together perhaps?" Gyp asked.

"If you like."

"On Thursday? A week from today."

Not lunch, she could not meet him for lunch on Thursday. Perhaps later . . . Dinner then, he said quickly; and she answered yes, I shall miss the bus. What time?

"Seven?" He gave the hour at random. Sever would do for him, or eight, or eleven, or midnight.

"Seven, yes."

He gave her the name of his hotel, they would meet in the upstairs lounge; she nodded and entered the bus. As it moved away he stood on the kerb and watched her, the yellow cap and the yellow hair. She took her place

inside at the very back. He waited on the kerb and thought she turned, but he could not be sure if she waved or not because of the rain on the glass.

He walked back to the timber factory, took the station wagon with the palings and drove back through the rain to Cravenmere.

Before he came down to Sagastrand Gyp had never kept a diary. On the day that he left his London office for the last time he purchased one, intending to record faithfully at the end of each day all that had passed in it, recording the work completed. It had another purpose also. In it he noted everything he saw or encountered which would be of interest to Jonathan and could be repeated to him, using his eyes for his brother. He purchased a desk diary with a lock, narrow-ruled, a page for each day. Like many another diary, it began well. But after the first week, when the new routine was established and could provoke no original comment, it lapsed. Pages were turned with no more than a few words scrawled slantwise, though in a neat script: a note that there were mole-hills appearing in the grassland, that the elderberries were ripe and the dogwood in the hedges, and that pheasants were plentiful in the woods inland. A remark that he was twelve hours in bed with the migraine, or that the cook Hille threatened to leave and was pacified. When Barbara came, and more guests, the pages were filled again. Then a note to jog his memory, or nothing at all. In the evening when he had returned from Croxton he opened his diary for the first time in several days.

For the following Wednesday he had written: *List from E. for Croxton.*

Thursday was blank.

He wrote for Thursday the letter *L*; an enormous capital filling the page.

"You may talk," Bossie said, "but please don't move your head. And I would rather you didn't smile."

He was finishing a pastel of Lucia in her yellow cap. She sat on a hard wooden chair a little more than half in profile, looking at the opposite wall with an air of great interest.

"There's nothing to smile about," she said.

"It was really rather disconcerting...(that's my new word, Bossie.)

"I was walking along Rowan Street and thinking about him. I don't remember what exactly, just *about* him. And then something brushed my arm and—*voilà!*—there he was. A little disconcerting—like the genie of the lamp! I had to go over my thoughts all over again in a sort of rush, just as if I'd been talking aloud. You know when you are walking along by yourself and you've been along that way so often before and you know what's in all the windows. And you get to thinking all sorts of things, and sometimes they're all right and sometimes they're not all right, and it doesn't matter a bit because nobody, nobody knows. Like cheating dreams when you're not properly asleep.

"Well, he made me feel guilty.

"I wonder if he always has that effect on people? He has a sort of air of being *definite*, as if he knows exactly where he is going and why, and what he's going to do when he gets there. He makes you feel that you *don't*, and you're being rather aimless. (I know I am rather aimless, Bossie, but I hate being told so.) I had the feeling that he was on his way from A to B and took me, as it were, in his stride. We'd only met once before. It's

always a little difficult, isn't it?—meeting someone for the second time. Usually you find yourself repeating the original conversation all over again. The number of things you can say to a stranger are really terribly limited. Anyone else would have gone by with a sort of hello there, or else asked some very silly and pointless question to start the ball rolling. That's what most men do, anyway. But he didn't. He just said: 'I want to talk to you, Lucia,' in rather a cross way, as if he didn't much care to stop and chat to a woman on a street corner. Then he suggested I had a drink with him—plainly for the same reason. Not at all flattering, Bossie! Not a bit good for my ego.

"I wish I had accepted now, because he didn't tell me in the end what he wanted to say. And I've been curious—woman's privilege, Bossie, or is it changing one's mind?—most curious ever since. So I'm having dinner with him next week, which is a thing I never do, and I don't know why I'm doing it now,* because I'm sure we shall be dreadfully bored with each other. It's sad Bossie . . . You know, I don't think he was in the least impressed with La Lucia. Do you think that's why I like him?

"Do you, Bossie?"

Bossie turned his head with a vague, slightly puzzled expression.

"Eh? Sorry, Lucy. I'm afraid I wasn't listening. I'm coming to the mouth now. Be a good girl and stop talking for a minute, will you?"

THROUGH the long night it rained, and Gyp, lying hours awake, listened to the silence of the house and heard now and then the rain swayed in gusts of wind and flung against his window; now and again the very distant chime of the hall clock, sonorous yet remote, the last strike lingering so long in the empty passages with no sound to answer it, fading so imperceptibly away, that it was impossible to tell at what point it passed into memory and the silence began again. I dreamed of you. Did you? Oh . . . I was sitting in a landing, a sort of nook, and you came down the stairs. You turned round . . . He fell asleep to the chime of the clock and the sound of her voice, with the wish that he in turn might dream of her. But when he awoke, the windows bright squares and the eaves outside dripping, he had not dreamed at all.

Through the long night it had rained, but the morning broke clear and bright to a new day; a freshened and a young universe; Sagastrand stark against the racing skies; the trees in strong relief almost bare, leaves falling scattered about the paths. The seas ran in fresh against the rocks, springing up in clean spray.

Up on the cliffs the live grass gave easily to the sharpened palings. Gyp worked out there all morning with Gill, but they seldom spoke to each other.

At the end of the day Gyp's diary held this entry: *A good start on the fence. Wrote to Croxton Girls' High School about Kay*, because he had done both these things and

could not remember having done anything else. The rest of the day seemed somehow to have slipped by unnoticed. With his own thoughts for company he had moved as it were on another plane entirely, and one that had nothing to do with days and hours and the count of time. He returned not once but many times to savour those moments, now properly belonging to the past, when he had been with her; ventured at will into a future of his own design and making, a pattern with the quality of a dream, uncomplicated by logical reasoning or—any longer—by self-analysis. He was aware that in meeting Lucia again he was acting, probably, unwisely; and that nothing good would come of it. But against this he set a great confidence that the future would resolve itself and must—a lazily conjured reference to the gods, a conviction that on this new plane these things were of no consequence.

The unfinished letter to Jonathan, found in his coat pocket, was tossed aside, disregarded, destroyed.

And all day he was happy.

Because of the *L* in his diary.

The tower room was on two levels and almost circular—not quite, for there was a squared wall and a sharp angle where the stairs came up from the body of the house, and this made a convenient recess, sufficiently large to take a divan bed and two heavy, standing cupboards. The room, like most in Sagastrand, was of considerable proportions; the bed and suite of easy chairs and wide sofa, and the grand piano which stood alone on a raised segment, three shallow steps higher, by no means filled the room or crowded it.

Penelope, widening the slit of the door, found the room dim with a half-light, the curtains drawn. She

closed the door carefully behind her and stood with her back to it, leaning back, until her eyes became used to the dimness. There was a sheen on the piano which caught her attention, and she moved towards it like a thief, moving softly. But her fear was the other side of the door, lest someone discover her here; she alone of the family found no ghosts in the house. She had remembered nothing of it, she had been too young; even her father was remembered from talk and old photographs. This room had been his, the piano where he composed, the bed in which he slept but did not die; she remembered that he had not died in bed. Here, perhaps, slipping so from the round piano stool half up, half down the three steps. She seated herself on the stool and moved her hands over the closed keyboard, imagining herself Paris, imagining herself composing, playing, evoking from the polished wood a melody of poignant sweetness, lingering, haunting, weeping music—her fingers sped over the wood harder and stronger, a majestic piece this, rolling the sound out into the room, crashing and thundering to the echo, beating like the sea against the walls. . . .

And quite suddenly she was still with fright. It came vividly to her that it was true; it was in this manner that Paris had played, the music was his music and real, not imaginary at all. In a moment if she tried she could hum the theme of it again and remember it. She was pierced through with a thrill of excitement nearly half pleasant, more than half really frightening; seeing herself possessed by the room, in the role of a medium at a séance. For she had never in her life heard her father play. She had no knowledge of the music he had composed.

And then with disappointment and relief she knew that it was Jonathan, not Paris. Her father's music, but

it was Jonathan who had played it like this. Years before, before he was blinded, before the war, in London when they had all been living for a time at Hammer-smith. Jonathan had often sat at the piano and often played this piece. She could even remember the name. *Morgenlied*, morning song.

She tested the lid over the keyboard. It was unlocked, or perhaps the lock was broken. She lifted it and just touched with the tip of her finger one yellowing note. A crash at the window startled her badly; her finger jerked down, striking out the one note clearly, loud in its vibrations. She trod frantically on the soft pedal and muted it. It was nothing, a shutter outside swung-to by a gust of wind. She left the piano and went towards the door and stopped. Someone was coming up. Because she could not escape without passing the person on the stairs, she turned and flung herself sulkily into one of the easy chairs, hoping all the same that it was not Gyp.

But it was Barbara. She opened the door cautiously, her eyes narrowed for the want of light. She jumped when she saw Penelope. "Oh!—it's you." She looked relieved, then annoyed. "Penny, never do that again."

"I'm not doing anything," Penelope said. "Just sitting."

"I mean on the piano."

"Did I frighten you?" Penelope asked, sitting round and leaning forward over the arm of her chair; eagerly because she wanted to know. "Did you think it was . . . Well, did you think it was——"

"Don't be an ass," Barbara interrupted her. "I didn't think anything at all. I just wondered who on earth it was, playing the fool up here."

She could see that Penelope did not believe her. Impatient of the gloom she went quickly to the window and

drew a curtain aside. The daylight drew rich colours from the carpets, shone back from the woodwork, a mirror on the wall leaped into prominence. The room was instantly warm and cheerful, not even Penelope could make a mystery of it. Watching Barbara, she observed sullenly that Gyp would notice the curtain.

"He is out at the back with Gill," Barbara told her. "Putting up the fence. Why? Does it matter?"

"He doesn't like anyone coming up here."

"Oh, nonsense."

"It isn't nonsense," Penelope said resignedly. She was by so many years the youngest of the family that she was used to having her opinions flatly contradicted. "I came up here once before. He didn't say anything. But afterwards he came up himself and went round the room as if he thought I'd stolen something."

"Why? What's so special about this room?"

"It's Jonathan's."

Barbara seemed about to speak but she turned to the window, glanced out, and then back into the room. For a reason she could not have explained, Penelope defended Gyp, as though against an unspoken criticism. After all, she said, it was not so surprising. Gyp had taken tremendous trouble with this room. With the whole house, Barbara suggested; and Penelope said but particularly with this room. He has made it very nice. But that isn't the point.

Discovering her sister's ignorance, Penelope made of her own knowledge a secret; and having successfully created a mystery, maintained it jealously as long as possible.

"What is the point?" Barbara asked, curious now.

"Haven't you noticed?"

Barbara looked about her, dark eyebrows curved high

in amusement. "It looks just as it always did. I can't see any difference."

"No . . . exactly!" Penelope jumped up, laughing. "Oh, Barbara!—it wasn't the same at all! When we came the piano was downstairs, there was another suite altogether, an old four-poster bed. The fireplace was half-bricked in with an electric fire in the hearth! Some dreadful curtains. Sometimes Gyp remembered and sometimes Liza, it took them about a week to find all the old stuff. And now this is *exactly* as it was when we left. Jonathan had the room then. I don't remember, of course, but he *did*, and we're hoping Jon will . . . *picture* it, and be able to find his way about here. Wasn't it a brainwave?"

"It was certainly very thoughtful of Gyp."

"Oh, Gyp's been marvellous," Penelope cried, dismissing Gyp. "I *do* hope Jonathan likes it. It gets all the morning sun, and the piano's been tuned and the man said it had a beautiful tone. Of course it's a Steinway. Mind you, I'm not sure that *I'd* like it up here alone. I'd have the feeling that no one could hear you if you screamed. Of course, I wouldn't, but it's hateful to think that nobody could hear you if you did. But really it's the dark I should be afraid of. And Jonathan's always in the dark, of course, so I suppose it does give you a sort of advantage against ghosts and things, being blind I mean . . ."

Barbara had seated herself on the piano stool to attend to this chatter. Her own face, like Puck's, was mischievous and amused in the polished wood, perceiving her own blend of humour. She asked at last: "Do you talk to the guests like this?"

"Oh, Barbara—of course I don't! Except Shaun. With Shaun I do. You know Shaun reminded me of

somebody the first time I saw him. Hugh, your Ex. But Shaun doesn't mind a bit what I say, he says . . ."

Afterwards, Barbara could not remember what it was that Shaun said. She slid back into the stream of private contemplation, losing the thread of Penelope's talk, if there was a thread.

Presently Shaun's car was heard under the window, and Penelope jumped up and clattered away down the stairs, leaving Barbara alone in the tower room. Jonathan's room, Barbara thought. It was the thought of Jonathan that had brought her quickly up here. Hearing that one bold note on the piano she had thought that he had arrived, and had come secretly up to his room.

And now, with leisure to reflect upon this, it struck her as manifestly absurd, without rhyme or reason, an idiotic supposition. And yet not. Now, after the sharp banging of the car door outside, after the dwindling sound of Penelope's footsteps on the old stairway running to meet him; now the silence flowed back to Barbara bringing a recollection of her sudden panic when she had passed the foot of these stairs, that went up to the tower room, and heard the piano. Her first thought had been for Gyp: whether he knew; and remembering in the same moment that Gyp was out there on the cliffs with Gill, she had made herself come up. She had believed that it was Jonathan up here, not because she supposed no one else was capable of tinkering with the piano, or because Gyp did not like others in the room—she had not known this; she had supposed that it was Jonathan because this was what she most dreaded. She had not known this; now she knew. Her divorce, and the prolonged agony and distress of it, the quarrelling and meanness that stepped so swiftly into the breach made by the absence of love, or the absence

of its masquerade, had left her seriously ill. Three doctors examined her and found nothing organically wrong, unwilling to admit, apparently, that unhappiness is a sickness at least as palpable as pleurisy; a fourth credited her with a nervous breakdown. She had never known if this was true, she had recovered of herself without recourse to medicine, but afterwards she believed it. When her colour and her sleep and her own sense of humour were restored to her, there remained in truth something like a nerve exposed, gifting her with a heightened perception of people and of herself that was *sey*. It was Kay who saved her. For Kay's sake she had had no choice but to break through the introspection which she had cast like a magic ring about herself, burying her head in the sand. Kay had been screened from the divorce proceedings. Kay looked up to her as a grown-up person, kind and worldly wise, infallible and unselfish. And for Kay's sake she had become all these things. Yet the quality of intuition remained with her, disciplined and strengthened by an innate streak of absolute logic. Just as she did not consider—as the rest of the family considered—that the stories current concerning Paris after his death justified the conclusion that he had been necessarily either a rogue or a genius, neither did she see any reason to suppose that the circumstance of Jonathan's blindness should have materially altered his character.

There was a photograph of him in the centre of the mantelpiece, taken many years before in uniform. The photograph included sufficient of his slender chest to display the spread of ribbons which crowded it. He was a young Paris: the loosely waving, untidy brown hair, the arched brow, the aquiline nose with small, delicate and entirely arrogant nostrils that would flair out in

anger. No lines in his face then, or else the photographer had done away with them; no scars, and a great deal of expression in the dark eyes. He was photographed looking directly into the camera, so that his eyes were upon you wherever you stood in the room. Looking at the photograph Barbara found him handsome, debonair and cynical. Cynical particularly she found him, as if he knew the rest; as if he modelled the uniform and played the part, withholding his real self and denying these things significance. And she thought: perhaps that is true.

Before she went downstairs she drew the curtain across the window again; and before she drew the curtain glanced once more out at the thinning trees silver-barked, the green undulations of the downs over towards Croxton, thinking that it was a beautiful view and thinking that it was wasted from this window.

Shaun had not left the car. Roof and windows were stripped down, his hair wildly tangled. "Get your bonnet on, Angel," he said. "We're going out." Thus with a gesture the world at her feet, he made her a present of a fine day. The engine of the car was still running.

"Oh, Shaun, Shaun!" Penelope ran out to him, tiny under the great curved arch of the door, ran out of its dense shadow, breathless against the side of the car. "Darling, I *can't*."

No such word as *can't*.

They argued about it a little, the low door on which she leaned throbbing with the regular pulse of the engine. She pleaded her household duties; he teased and chided her. Cooped up in a house on a day like this! And this made her smile, it was so inapplicable to Sagastrand. But perhaps in Kenya all days were like this, all

houses too small. Still she was adamant, she could not leave the hotel now. Gyp—— He interrupted her. Gyp is busy with his fence. A man's job, he doesn't need you. No, not Gyp, Liza. Will Liza mind, then? It isn't Liza who will mind, it's Gyp. And now she was confused.

"Not Gyp, Liza," Shaun mocked her. "It isn't Liza, it's Gyp." He switched the engine off and got out of the car. "Angel. Go and get a coat, I'll square Gyp." Not stopping to see whether she obeyed—perhaps knowing that she would—he went off round the side of the house, hands in his pockets, whistling.

Both Gyp and Gill were in their shirt sleeves. There was little to tell between master and servant. Both wore old, rumpled clothes, shoes muddied from the damp undersoil. Gill's bare arms were calloused and knotted, Gyp's smooth, but both were thickly made, and, when they worked with the heavy mallet and bundles of the palings, curved with the same play of muscle under the skin. Looking from one to the other, Shaun took his hands out of his pockets and stopped whistling. Accustomed to a hard and an open-air life himself, and accustomed on occasion to boasting of it, he was prone to judge other men first of all by their physique, and he had not previously considered Gyp as strong. The discovery that Gyp was a very much stronger man than himself undermined his self-confidence. But Gyp's slow smile, the awkward smile that was a long time coming, reassured him.

In fact, Shaun's presence embarrassed Gyp. He was reminded of his own unequivocal declaration that he did not like the man; and that Penelope had repeated this to Shaun. He was relieved when Shaun spoke of running into Croxton and asked if he might borrow Penelope for the afternoon. He agreed at once. He

added of his own accord that it was a pity to waste the day indoors.

Shaun was agreeably surprised. Watching for Penelope to come out of the house, he stayed to talk with Gyp, volunteering the information that he had been in Croxton that morning and had seen at an exhibition in one of the stores a painting of the harbour. He wanted it to take back with him, he knew exactly where it would hang in his bungalow, and he had for a long time wanted a good landscape of home. But the price had been outrageous. Yet he wanted it, and could not make up his mind. And in the end he had decided to ask Penelope's opinion, to let her decide for him.

"Do you think," Gyp said seriously, "that Penelope knows enough about it?"

Shaun laughed. "No; spin a coin if you like. But it's more fun asking Penny."

"When do you go back?" Gyp asked.

"Oh—a week. A bit less than a week."

Gyp showed his surprise. "As soon as that?"

"I should have gone ages ago. I'll have to fly out as it is."

Gill was moving away from them. He was gathering up the twine which Gyp had laid before they began the fence, rolling it on to a peg. After a moment, when Gill was further off, Gyp said: "Does Penny know?"

"No." Shaun looked again to the house, but she had not come out. "Pity to spoil her fun. She's a nice kid." And with his eye on the house, he said: "Still pretty empty, aren't you? You know, what you want is a golf course."

"A golf course?" Gyp repeated.

"And tennis or squash—something to bring people out here. You know, there's nowhere else within twenty

miles of Croxton. I went to a dance a few days ago. I had to drive miles along the coast. Ever thought of getting a licence? Run a bar, have dancing at the week-ends: that's what people want. I know. I've stayed in Croxton and it dies quietly every Saturday. There's money there. And not everybody has television and wants to be a troglodyte all week-end."

Gyp said slowly, considering this: "I expect you're right, Shaun. But I'm afraid we planned something rather different here."

Shaun did not argue. Penelope appeared by the car. She had put on her raglan coat and tied a scarf over her hair. She waved anxiously and Shaun, briefly excusing himself, hurried back to her.

"Didn't he mind?" Penelope said.

"Why should he mind? Of course not. He seemed in rather a good mood as a matter of fact."

"What were you talking about for so long? I watched you from the window."

"About the hotel," Shaun said promptly.

As he moved the wheel, taking the corner beyond the carriage-way on to the coast road, she noticed his hand.

She asked him idly: "What's that?"

"What?"

"On the back of your hand. The mark." She had not previously noticed it.

Shaun glanced down. She was pointing to the small circular scar left by the burn of Lucia's cigarette.

"Oh, the scar," he said. "Did I never tell you?"

"No; tell me now."

"The farm," he said, "is right at the edge of the bush, and last summer there was a leopard . . ."

6

ON Thursday Gyp drove into Croxton and stayed that night in the hotel there, as he had done on the day that he met Barbara from the train. He told the family that he was meeting a friend. No one queried this. Gyp had many friends. For that night he was given the same room as before.

Lying there on the bed fully clothed, he heard the great clock strike twice above the dark silence of the town. He had forgotten the clock. The first strike was a hammer-stroke in his brain, so violent that he nearly cried out with the pain. The migraine made him insensible to all else. His pen slipped from his fingers and fell with a clatter between bed and table. He drove his fists cruelly against his head, as though, by intensifying the hurt he could change its nature and find a relief. He wanted to vomit and was powerless to move. The second chime of the clock came as a flash of light, obliterating the room and himself, stripping his consciousness of all save the pain itself, sweeping away reason and memory, even the knowledge that he suffered.

With the diminishing of the clock's chime, this also diminished.

He became aware that he had been writing, or about to write; and then that he was happy, before he remembered the reason for it, as if happiness had been an integral part of his existence, inseparable from the act of living. He had written nothing yet, evidently. The diary was blank on this page except for that tremendous

L across it. He found his pen again, and, propping himself on one elbow, began to write over the *L*, writing very small. *Dined with Lucia at my hotel.*

She had worn a dark, navy-blue frock that he had not seen before, trimmed with white, high at her throat and of a simple design. The sleeves were tight-fitting, three-quarter length. When she raised her glass he had noticed the fine blue veins in the delicate underpart of her wrist. They had dined quickly, almost abruptly. She had eaten sparingly and he, with the migraine coming upon him, could not touch the food. You should have telephoned, she said, and put me off, and he answered, I nearly did.

It isn't too late, she had said then, almost as if she would have been glad to go: it isn't too late.

But it was.

As they left the hotel together, crossing the street to the station wagon, someone came behind them walking with a stick. The stick tapped on the pavement, and Lucia turned her head and said I thought that was your brother for a moment.

He supposed that she meant the stick, but when he looked back he thought there was something of Jonathan in the man. But how could you tell? he asked her, you have never seen him; and she said, I have, as a child. But smiling, so that he thought she teased him again and perhaps was lying. And then she said no, but you have talked about him so much. It was a curious thing that so often when she spoke in that way, lifting her tone and smiling at him, he did not know whether he should believe her or not. And then he thought that he had been talking too much about Jonathan, and that this was her meaning.

They had driven down the coast, not to Cravenmere

but to another part. He drove where the road went because he did not know where to go. He had not thought then that it was strange entertainment to offer her, so much of himself; strange entertainment or perhaps none. But now, in his room in the hotel going over these things in his mind, he thought it strange. He had been anxious because of the migraine to escape from the clatter of the restaurant, and she had agreed at once: people, I'm tired of people. She had agreed to a drive, but they did not drive either, they sat on the sea-wall watching the white waves.

You look ill, Lucia said, solicitous for him, and he told her that he was better. It was true: if he kept his head still in the night air it did not ache so; if he sat down he was no longer afraid of the sickness. Either he was better or else he did not care any more because of her. It was then that he had asked her a question, and this he recorded in his diary.

Dined with Lucia at my hotel. I asked her: What is it like to be beautiful?

Her brown eyes long-lashed, the curve of her cheekbone always pale but now of an almost ethereal pallor, the reflection of the moon off the sea to which she turned for answer. A moment before they had watched the last of the sun: one shaft of brilliance returning from infinity to their feet, arrow-straight over the stippled water, so well defined that it seemed they might get up and walk that golden pavement direct to the horizon, and beyond, perhaps. A pleasing fancy, of no consequence save that it occurred to both of them simultaneously.

What is it like to be beautiful—really beautiful?

The waves broke at a little distance from them, a white line emerging from the dark mass of the sea, the breakers piling up on the sands and receding with a

long hiss, like an indrawn breath. It did not occur to Gyp that in his question he praised her; he was sure that it did not occur to Lucia to find a compliment there. The waves broke and receded a second time before she formed an answer for him.

What is it like?

Lonely, I suppose. You have many friends and no friends at all. Not women because in the end they distrust you, always. Not men because—they are men. And she said, does your brother use a stick?

Qui s'élève s'isole, Gyp observed, and because she did not have even this much French he said, they say you are always lonely if you raise yourself above the crowd.

But I haven't raised myself!

You must have put every other woman in the shade since you were a child. Isn't it the same?

But she answered with another question, how was he blinded? Though Gyp saw the pit she made for him, he went obligingly on and into it. Jonathan had been blinded in the war, flying; in a dog-fight, there were two planes and he shot one down and, his ammunition being exhausted, rammed the other, and went down with it. These were the bare facts of the citation, only Jonathan could tell her more, and he would not. He must be very brave, Lucia said.

No, not brave. Many were brave, I was brave.

Smiling, curious, she said, what did you do?

Do? Why, I went on instead of running away when they shot at me. Like everybody else.

And when, disbelieving his sincerity, she began to laugh, he said, No, you don't understand. Many were brave and afraid. A few, like Jonathan, were entirely without fear. He was always like that, as a child. We

were reckless, we took risks as children for the thrill of it, but he didn't. He would do anything if challenged; not for sport but to prove himself. He broke his arm when he was nine climbing a tree with dead branches, he fell thirty feet. Perhaps the music was also in a sense a challenge like the tree, for the hours of constant practice exhausted him. At nineteen, when the war came, he was studying in France, and according to his tutor might have become a fine pianist, better than Paris ever was. And then, when the last of the operations was over and nothing more could be promised or hoped for, still the family had clung to the hope that he might continue with his music. After St Dunstan's, I sent him to France again, Gyp said, when the war was over, to his old tutor. But within a month he was back and— Useless, he said, useless: why pretend? Still . . . maybe the old room in the house, with the same piano where he had learned his first scales . . . with no one to hinder or drive him. Maybe he will try again.

You have done a lot for him, Gyp.

No, not enough. The money was nothing, I was doing well, I had money.

You had everything, she said, and he answered everything and nothing.

I had reached a point where life was meaningless—do you understand? Where the past and the future were of a pattern, foresecable to the end. My worries were not real worries and my amusements not pleasure. I felt that I was going through life in a closed carriage on a main road. As though I should one day arrive at the end in considerable ease, but without having discovered what manner of place the world is. I suppose a lot of people feel that sooner or later: a sense of having

missed the point, of having occupied themselves with trivialities. I could have married. There was a girl once, two or three years ago.

I could have married, he said, but I didn't; and she said, because of Jonathan.

But he did not want to talk any more of Jonathan, or of anyone except themselves. He put out his hand lightly and took her arm, and he said, I have been wanting to do that all evening.

Gyp, she said.

Gyp, this is very important to you, isn't it?—the family and the hotel.

Very important, Lucia.

And I am no part of it, Gyp.

There had been no question in it. I am no part of it, no part; but she did not look for an answer.

It would always be like this, she said slowly, there will always be Jonathan.

His arm still held her. He moved her head a little with his hand and moved his own mouth down to hers, but she turned aside. No, Gyp. He let her go, and took his pipe from his pocket and began to fill it slowly; she said do you want to smoke so badly? He told her, very badly, smiling, but it was true all the same.

They talked of this and that—of other things. Her eyes were brown, after all, and she was twenty-three.

She is twenty-three, he wrote in his diary.

He had asked her unhurriedly, curiously, why didn't you let me kiss you? It was too like my dream, she said. In your dream did I kiss you?

She nodded gravely— Oh, look! Silver in the waves there leaping, a fish perhaps, or perhaps it was not a fish. At once it was gone.

Gyp! She caught his arm, laughing, laughing. Isn't

this fun, Gyp? There—now I've knocked your pipe out of your hand!

For no reason he was seized with a fear that she had been here before to this place. He asked her, have you been here before?

Often.

But . . . at night?

And she caught his meaning and laughed aloud, her head thrown back in abandon, and said no, never, you are very original! No, never, never.

It was cold now, September weather, the unseasonable summer's day gone, the wind freshening in over the sea, the night air chill. Lucia turned up the collar of her coat for warmth and then, discovering that this masked her mouth and would come higher still, she made a veil of it and peered at him over the top with her wide-eyed innocent stare. She made a habit of little poses. She had a neat way of setting one foot out at an angle when she stood, a trim manner of setting her hands one in the other behind her. He thought her like an actress playing a skilled, studied role carelessly, *ars est celare artem*—comedy, comedy always, for there was a suggestion of laughing in it, a hint of mockery: a joke, a jest, a sense of the ridiculous which you were expected to understand, invited to share if you could.

They talked of music and people, of life and purpose, of a hundred profound things but without profundity, lightly, amusedly. It was nearly midnight before they left. She took his arm to cross the sands back to the station wagon. He set his hand over hers, covering it as though he claimed possession of her, holding it. All the drive back to Croxton they talked—of what he would not now recall, though not a syllable of it was lost to him. He left her at the white block of flats as before.

I will meet you, he said, a week from today, at the hotel, at the same time. She hesitated; seemed about to refuse, to make difficulties; and made none. Yes, very well, if you wish.

Good night, Gyp.

And *thank* you.

In his diary that evening he wrote: *Dined with Lucia at my hotel. I asked her: What is it like to be beautiful? and Lonely, she said. She is twenty-three.* He wrote no more for that day, but for the following Thursday, flicking over the pages with a new impatience to be rid of those between, he wrote another *L*, bigger than the first. I love you, I love you, Lucia.

His first action on awaking was to stretch out his hand for the diary, as if to remind himself of her. He read the simple message of the previous evening a hundred times perhaps, until it became a key that opened many doors for him; and like a key, meaningless to others. It was the diary that reminded him of Penelope's birthday within a few days, and when he left the hotel, before returning to Sagastrand, he went into a departmental store to find a gift for her. He selected a manicure set in a red-leather case, and while this was being wrapped noticed a square of white board set up on a little easel by the lift, skilfully lettered in black: an exhibition of paintings by Bosham Vaughan on the third floor, the Croxton Galleries. It was a moment before he understood that the Croxton Galleries was merely the name given to the store's own exhibition stand. It was here no doubt that Shaun had come with Penny. Receiving her birthday gift neatly wrapped, he went on an impulse up the stairs, for it occurred to him that if he looked round the exhibition he could with advantage discuss it with

the others, and they would want to discuss it. There were few people in the store yet, only one or two on the upper floors. The pictures were hung on long white screens arranged to form long galleries, fluorescent lighting set above each frame.

One of the first pictures that he saw was a portrait of Lucia in the yellow cap.

It was on the right just at the entrance, a pastel in an antique frame and marked with a tag and the number 7. A girl in a pale-blue dress sat at a table with a book for visitors to sign and a fresh white stack of catalogues.

"Two and six," she said.

Gyp flung down a coin and snatched the top catalogue of the pile.

"And six," the girl said politely, looking at him.

He had given her a florin.

He found a note in his wallet, took whatever change she gave him and moved away, searching the catalogue for number 7. The paintings were listed numerically according to the tags, and against each number was the price in guineas. But against number 7, *Young Elizabethan*, were the words in neat italics *not for sale*.

There were many other portraits along the screens, several of women. One showed a model with very long black hair skilfully arranged so that, with a certain bend of her arm and her posture, she was in the most delicate way possible saved from absolute nudity. In front of this two women were standing. They were discussing it, apparently. "Of course," Gyp heard one of them say, "he is supposed to have been in love with her when he painted it—the usual thing."

"My dear, in bed with him by the look of it."

"Well . . . yes, I see what you mean."

"Who is she?"

"Haven't the leastest idea. Bossie finds them in the most unlikely places. But," the voice added, suddenly close so that Gyp stepped back to be out of the way, "I know who *this* is. *Young Elizabethan*, sweet young thing who couldn't leave her mother touch. Oliver's daughter, you know Oliver? Ironsides Products? Butter wouldn't melt. Perdita or something—some exotic Italian name, I forget."

She was the taller of the two who spoke. She was tall and graceful, exquisitely dressed, exquisitely spoken, her mannerisms were exquisite. There were auburn or henna lights in her hair, which was cropped short and brushed up like a boy's with careful carelessness. The second was shorter, fair and round-faced with a surprisingly delicate profile and pert, up-turned nose. She found praise for the portrait. She is very lovely, in a doubtful, wistful tone.

And the answer in the same mannered tone, lightly, deftly sceptical, Oh, everyone adores and 'dores her. With a gay little laugh which excluded herself.

"She has a hard look," the fair one said, as if she wished to agree. "Still," she added, her head on one side, looking at the picture, "still, if I were a man——"

"My dear, they say she's pi, there's the joke. Bossie's been trying to seduce her for *years*."

The fair one made a sympathetic clicking with her tongue which might have indicated that this was a good thing or a bad thing. They moved off together towards the stairs, the fair girl with very short, very neat steps, the dark girl walking from the hips gracefully, like a mannequin. As they went down the stairs Gyp heard her saying: "Rather galling in a way because Bossie is really . . . rather attractive . . ."

When the last sound of them was gone, Gyp returned

to the portrait, *Young Elizabethan*, Butter wouldn't melt, Lucia in the yellow cap.

How they hated her!

And yet, looking at the small features, the child's untroubled face there, the beauty and the innocence of it, he marvelled that anyone should call her *hard*.

Almost without exception the canvasses listed in the catalogue bore prices which seemed to him preposterously high, but he would have bought the picture of Lucia in the yellow cap no matter what the price. He would have bought it, but the catalogue said *not for sale*, not for sale. He turned and went down into the street with Penelope's birthday present tucked forgotten under his arm. He glanced up at the clock on the post-office, but in the station wagon driving back to Cravenmere discovered that his wrist-watch had stopped and could not remember the time on the post-office clock.

At Sagastrand he went straight to the office, a panelled room opening off the hall which had once been a small study and was changed in name only. He found Barbara there with his own account books open over the desk. He paused at the door in surprise to see her here at work, and then he smiled, but Barbara did not smile. "The Churchmans have gone," she said, and did not look at him.

"Gone?"

"An hour ago—barely an hour. They've found a house the other side of Croxton. He came back last night full of it, it seems it's exactly what they were looking for." She spoke in an off-hand manner, telling him these things as if she did not herself understand their import, but she anticipated his questions. "Of

course, they haven't moved in yet, but the place is standing empty and they want to get their own things in right away. So they're putting up at Croxton because it's nearer."

Gyp said nothing. He took off his coat and came close to the desk. Barbara had completed the entry in the receipt book and ruled a line in red beneath it. Her glance with nervousness just touched his face, and then returned to the book.

"He asked for his account this morning and paid in cash. Perhaps I should have asked for an extra week seeing it's such short notice . . ."

"It doesn't matter," Gyp said.

"Doesn't it? I've been looking through the accounts, the bills and things; I hope you don't mind."

"I don't mind," Gyp said. He was pleased that she had done this of her own accord.

Barbara said in a casual voice again: "We're running at a loss, of course."

"Yes."

"And the Churchmans' going will make it so much the worse—it will make quite a difference."

Gyp said again: "Yes."

And then, when he looked up from the ledger and caught her eyes again on his face, he said as if to reassure her: "It's out of season, don't forget."

She said drily: "I should imagine Cravenmere is out of season all the year round."

"And," Gyp added, "we expect to run at a loss for the first year or two."

"So great a loss?" Barbara's finger dropped significantly to the folder which held the accounts, the expenses incurred in making a private house into a residential hotel. "We aren't all blind, Gyp. Tell Liza

two years; tell Penny anything you like. But between ourselves ten or fifteen years is nearer the mark, isn't it? Oh, I know"—she interrupted him before he opposed her—"this is the beginning only, we've only just opened, it's out of season . . . things will be better. Or will they? Or isn't Shaun right after all?"

"Shaun?" Gyp said.

Shaun, Barbara told him, had dined with the family the previous evening taking, since he was the only man, Gyp's place at the head of the table. He had previously overheard Elizabeth and Mr Cunningham talking in the hall, and commiserated with them on the loss of two guests. And then he had gone on to express the opinions which he had already offered to Gyp out on the cliffs, drawing a vivid picture of the country club: the dances, the cars coming out from Croxton, golf and tennis and lights down the carriage-way. Penny had shared his enthusiasm—possibly with prior knowledge—from the start; Elizabeth presently, after some thought; and Barbara herself not at all. "But he's right, Gyp, all the same. I don't like the idea any more than you do, but he is right."

"Yes," Gyp said surprisingly. "I know."

He had known before Shaun told him. He said to Barbara: "Open the drawer—there, the lower one on your left." Wonderingly, she did so, held it open and looked enquiringly to him. "You will find a file there," he told her. "No, it's green, quite a small file." She found this and he asked her to open it, and she opened it and drew out a blue paper and unfolded it. It opened out to a large square sheet marked in squares and oblongs and triangles in white, with annotations.

"It looks like a map," she said.

"It is a map."

"Oh, I see . . . the house. And the road. And what's this?"

"The golf course. You see that it goes right on well beyond our land. And this is the tennis court; a hard court because we get a great deal of rain. And here—in the house—is the ballroom, and this is the American bar."

Gyp's finger drew her attention to each in turn.

She said: "Then you're going to do it, make it a sort of club?"

"No."

But he had no wish to mystify her; the explanation was perfectly simple. At the bottom right-hand corner of the blue-print was the name of the surveying firm who had drawn it up, and the date: six weeks before; long before Shaun had set eyes on the place. And in the same file, he told Barbara, she would find if she looked the estimated cost. He had, in fact, already approached a number of people who were in a position to finance the project. None had agreed to do so.

"But when Shaun spoke to you——" Barbara said.

"Yes?"

"Why didn't you tell him you had already gone into the whole thing and it was no good?"

"Why?" Gyp repeated, asking himself the question. "I suppose because I didn't really see that it was Shaun's business."

Barbara's glance met his, and faltered. She took the blue-print and folded it and returned it to the drawer. She closed the ledger and put it back on the shelf over the desk with the others. At the door she said: "I suppose that's how you were so successful in business."

He lifted his head and waited, not understanding.

"You let everybody believe you're a . . . Oh, a nice

sort of chap, but a bit of a fool you know, simple. And you're not. My God, you're not."

He considered this long after she had gone.

There were letters unopened on the desk, the day's post. A letter from Jonathan in a careful, backward-slanting hand. The pages inside would be typewritten with a few errors or none, but usually he addressed the envelope by hand because it was difficult to gauge the spacing on an envelope, his typewriter was spaced to the limits of quarto paper. Gyp put Jonathan's letter into his pocket unopened. Now that Barbara had gone with her questions, the room had the quality of a tomb in its silence. The diamond-latticed windows were shut against the morning birds; the walls were very thick in this part of the house, the panelling sealed the silence in. Because there had been no other sound he could at will recapitulate Barbara's words exactly as they had been spoken and in imagination hear them again and again; and not the words only, but the tone and inflection, the cadence and intonation and all the thousand tricks of tongue and palate which together make up the intricacies of human speech.

A bit of a fool you know, simple.

My God, you're not.

A nice sort of chap, but a bit of a fool.

He recalled the words as easily as if he moved back the needle of a gramophone. A bit of a fool.

Well, perhaps.

He had been filling his pipe and now he lit it and moved to the fireplace to discard the spent match. The fire was laid but not lit in the open hearth, thick twists of paper, and wood, and two apple logs from the old orchard that would burn clean with a sweet smell. More for the smell than the warmth he took another match

and set it aflame. He watched the flames leap up, the paper expand and open, the heavier wood sink down, one log suddenly slip. The kindling had been dried out inside the house. It cracked and exploded loudly in the room, sending only a fine, almost clear wreath of smoke up the chimney.

Odd that one knew so little of oneself, so very little. Simple, Barbara had called him, and almost he had claimed the epithet for himself and not found it derogatory, though that had been her interpretation of the word. And certainly his purpose had been simple, complicated neither by doubts of its practicability nor uncertainty of its logic and rightness. The purchase of the house had been no philanthropic impulse of a moment but the culmination of more than six years' careful and deliberate planning. That the last owner would sell he knew, for he had asked him, and discussed and bargained for a price when he was still a sergeant in the Artillery; when there was still one more year of the war to run its course, and he possessed no more than a few hundred pounds, and that by frugal saving.

He had told Lucia that he had had money; but when Jonathan was first blinded he had none. Barely sufficient when the war ended, and it became possible to trace his old tutor, to send Jonathan to France again to resume his studies. Yet he had known before this that he would one day buy the house. Barbara's divorce and breakdown, Penelope's headstrong waywardness and Elizabeth's placid inability to control or direct her—these were additional reasons, strengthening his resolve but in no way altering it. Paris, if he had been alive, would have carried them all—perhaps unknowingly—by the living example of his own pride and arrogance, a resilience of spirit inherited with his arched nose and

bad temper from other Paris's whose portraits lent colour to the walls of Sagastrand but whose names he had probably never troubled to ascertain. It had this much virtue at least: neither poverty nor failure could crush it, for he had known both. And Paris being dead, it seemed to Gyp that it was on himself that the ultimate responsibility fell. And having neither arrogance nor pride, he had sought another way.

When the last of the futile operations was over and it became known that Jonathan would never see again, Gyp was struck by the malignance of a fate which offered gifts, and offering, withheld them; struck by the unfairness of it, that Jonathan should be blinded, and that he himself who had no gifts should be the one to come through the war unscathed.

After the war when Gyp returned to his business they had been constantly together, at first in Gyp's own flat during the time when Jonathan was studying law and before he abandoned it; later, when he had gone to a poultry farm Gyp had been a regular week-end visitor. Gyp had cultivated the habit of descriptive observation, noting in word-pictures everything he saw each day which would be of interest to his brother. They became closer than ever before, closer even than they had been in childhood. And now, looking back on these things, Gyp had the thought that they had never been close in childhood: Jonathan's precocious maturity, his physical delicacy and his natural introversion had precluded the free intimacy common to the others. Certainly the occasions had been rare when he turned to Gyp for assistance; it was a novel experience to be able to help him, there had been little that he was not able to do better himself.

Yet before the war ended, perhaps with some

unexplained foreknowledge that Jonathan would not settle into the occupations carefully selected for him and for which St Dunstan's had trained him, Gyp had been negotiating for Sagastrand. But he had never deceived himself that the house possessed of itself magical qualities of healing. He had not after all, as Barbara claimed, put the clock back. His thoughts had turned to Sagastrand because he loved the house and because no other house would serve his purpose so well. It was the only house in which Jonathan had lived for a sufficient period of time to recall in his blind memory the exact details of the rooms and passages, the turn of the stairs, the placing of the furniture. Jonathan himself had told him this. Perhaps in his memory also he would find the by-ways and lanes again, the fall of the cliffs, the curve and sweep of harbour and downs. Here, and perhaps here alone, might he be able to free his mind from the distractions of blind uncertainty and endless enquiry, and find, perhaps, his music again in Paris's room where he had practised with stumbling fingers his first scales.

For peace of mind, Gyp had believed then, was the greatest of all the gifts offered by God to man. The years that followed, when he became by degrees successful and even prosperous, had not altered this conception. He had mingled with men who were manifestly rich and acknowledged to be learned, and who had confirmed that without peace of mind both riches and learning can be scarcely more than a burden. He had found this peace early in himself; and now, in the deliberate duplicity of meeting Lucia in Croxton and holding it secret to himself, he had of himself already half destroyed it.

More than half an hour after Barbara had gone out of the room, Elizabeth came to him. She knocked on the door first before she entered, a quiet tap, and looked

to him with apprehension, so that he knew Barbara had repeated to her their conversation. He had drawn a chair up before the fire and sat with his head in his hands—for how long he had been sitting there like this he could not tell. But he got up when his mother came in. She glanced out through the window, Barbara's trick of not looking at him, but Elizabeth used it only when she was nervous. He said nothing, waiting. At last she turned back into the room with sudden decision, as if she had made up her mind to some unpleasant, unavoidable task. "I've been talking to Barbara."

"You mustn't let it worry you," Gyp said cheerfully enough.

"About Shaun's scheme—the country club."

"Yes, it was a good idea. But I have gone into it. I'm afraid it's out of the question."

"No," Elizabeth said, "it isn't."

Smiling, he asked her: "Do you know of anyone who will finance it? Risk several thousand?"

But her answer took away his smile, in the same moment. "Yes. Will Cromwell."

Elizabeth was very pale. Watching her, he said slowly: "I never thought of Cromwell."

"No—why should you?"

He thought she swayed standing there, but as she made a movement towards the desk he could not be sure. He swung a chair round for her by the fire, but she declined it. "I'll be all right in a moment. It's close in here." He opened a window for her. It was true, he had smoked two or three pipes in the room. She said:

"I've been worried, Gyp. It would make all the difference, wouldn't it?"

He said guardedly: "It might."

"No, Barbara told me. Will would do it, I'm sure."

"But you don't like asking him."

"No," Elizabeth said, "I don't like it much," and then looked at him in surprise that he should know this. "He has done so much already," she said, offering some explanation. "He can be . . . difficult, you know—sometimes. I would speak to him myself—perhaps that would be the best thing. But I don't really understand the money side at all."

The thought of his mother carrying through a financial deal brought Gyp's smile back readily. Cromwell, he remembered now, was head of an industrial firm, Ironsides Products. Seeing in imagination Elizabeth going to Cromwell and pleading with him perhaps, he said sharply: "No. If we approach Cromwell it is going to be with a sound proposition. Liza, it is sound, you know; we have no need of charity. He will want chapter and verse. Do you know where I can get in touch with him?"

"He has a house not far from here," Elizabeth said. "He comes down sometimes; at the week-ends I think. He used to. I'll phone him and ask if he'll see you."

"Have you got the number?"

For once opposing him, she said: "I'll phone. Let me, it's better."

He would have argued, but seeing her face averted, let her have her way.

It was settled then: Elizabeth should telephone Cromwell and make an appointment for Gyp to see him. "And now I really must go and see to the table."

But she went upstairs to her room and rested for a few minutes on the bed. She wondered what Cromwell would say, and how his voice would sound after so long. She had not spoken to him since Paris died; since he came up here in answer to her desperate letter to settle

the affairs of the house. And before that, years before, she remembered him.

November the eleventh, 1918. Armistice, and all London wild with the whirling, gay exultation of it. The city seemed given up to unending festival, carnival; the streets teeming with thousand upon thousand of men and women, light-hearted, light-headed; the streets ablaze with a spontaneous conflagration of light and laughter, of singing and shouting, every man for once in truth beloved of his neighbour. A night of arms linked with arms, of kisses freely given and taken, a heart on a sleeve. And somewhere there in the very heart of the crowds, William Cromwell, corporal of the Engineers, and young Eliza Caswell, freed from the draper's shop with a length of red, white and blue ribbon for her hair, clinging with both her arms to one of his. "Oh, Will!" she cried again and again, "Will . . .!" She insisted on her private joke, that all this celebration was for him. "I went to the Lord Mayor of London," she sang, "and I said, 'My Will is coming home.' And he said, 'Very well, Miss Caswell, I'll tell them.'"

They came upon Paris somewhere in the Mall, flushed and hatless. He too was in uniform, a major in a Lancer regiment, but much younger than Cromwell, almost like a girl himself he was so young and fresh complexioned and slender. He was with a crowd of officers and girls, and one of the girls was from Elizabeth's shop, and they shouted their names. Nigel and Hamish, Enid and Elizabeth, Charlotte and Emily, William. They had gone on down the Mall, all of them together, and one of the officers struck up a patriotic song. In a moment they were all singing it. Then another song, unfamiliar to Elizabeth but catching. The officers knew it evidently.

They sang lustily, now and again slurring the words from a consideration of the ladies, but more often not troubling. They marched to the tune of it, and presently Elizabeth and Cromwell sang it with the rest. It was a topical song composed, they afterwards learned, by Paris himself the same day. Within a few weeks it was to be heard everywhere among the troops, in barracks and canteens, in messes and on the march. A month or so later a rather less bawdy version was brought out—though Paris had nothing to do with it—and it became a popular music-hall number with the approval of the Lord Chamberlain.

Now they sang to it and marched to it until they ran into thicker crowds again that broke up their files. In the way of crowds shifting without direction, individuals became separated or forced a way through to claim a friend. Presently there were left the three of them, Elizabeth in the centre with Cromwell in possession of one arm, and Paris, somehow, the other. Paris was carrying a heavy trench-coat over his free arm. He stopped abruptly, swinging them all to a halt. He passed the trench-coat to Cromwell: hold this a moment old chap; and Cromwell did, unthinkingly, and Paris took Elizabeth in both arms and kissed her full on the mouth. Cromwell was thunderstruck. Then he laughed with them. They went on again, and after a few paces Cromwell stopped and kissed Elizabeth himself, but it was not the same.

They lost Paris in the end. Another girl attached herself to him and drew him away. Cromwell and Elizabeth had the rest of the night to themselves. They made a random tour of houses and cafés, of public houses and friends and strangers—anyone who showed a light and gave them welcome. Both of them drank too much;

neither of them cared. Cromwell forgot Paris, but Elizabeth did not. And so in the end it was an old story told again: a story one may read, observe, smile over, frown over and imagine a thousand times until it becomes humdrum, and yet never understand that it can happen to oneself. Elizabeth weighed Cromwell against Paris and found him wanting. He had neither name nor family, nor a great house on the coast, nor money nor talent nor—to any comparable degree—personal charm. Paris had all these things, and he flattered her in a way impossible to Cromwell. So she married Paris. But before she married him she met Cromwell for the last time. It was not an unpleasant meeting, for Cromwell had been neither angry nor bitter, only hurt; and this he would not show her. He had said only: "If you ever need anything, Liz . . . you'll always know where to find me." And then he said: "Always."

Neither of them, probably, had seen the irony in that, considering that she would have everything; he nothing but an inferiority complex and a persistent determination in spite, or because, of it.

But the true irony was later, when their positions were precisely reversed; when Cromwell was married with a child of his own and free of all claim of her, for there was little sentimentality in the man. When Paris died and she wrote to Cromwell and he came. You will know where to find me, Liz, he had said. Always.

He had no time for her against the background of the great house, her own children looking down their noses at him, slyly mimicking the burr in his speech. Even in her gratitude, Elizabeth had looked at the man and wondered, and searched in vain for some quality that must have attracted her so many years before.

But she was sure that he would see Gyp.

She telephoned him the next morning, and reported to Gyp that Cromwell would see him. "He is coming down this week; he suggested you have dinner with him at his house. It's very lucky—he'll only be there the one night, he is visiting some factory or something in Croxton."

Gyp was pleased. "I'll drive over. What day did you say?"

"Thursday. He said be sure to go early; about half-past six. That will give you plenty of time to talk."

"Thursday." Gyp repeated.

"Yes. You'll be going into Croxton, and I thought it would be a good day. Although there was no alternative, really, he's only there the one evening. Perhaps if you're very late you could spend the night in Croxton if you don't want to drive back. The same as you did last week." And then she said: "Oh dear! Gyp, you've broken your pipe."

He had snapped the stem in his hand.

There was no way of letting her know.

If he had known her surname he would have had a waiter page her there in the hotel lounge and hand her a note or a message. Or he would have looked up the name in the telephone directory, hoping that she was on the telephone; and if it was a common name like Jones or Brown then he would have telephoned all the numbers with that name until he found her by asking for Lucia. And if she was not on the telephone he would have looked for her name in the Croxton directory, which gives the street and the number of the house, so that if a person has lived in Croxton long enough and you know the initial and the district, you can find them. Or he would have telephoned back from

Cromwell's house to the hotel at seven o'clock and asked for her.

It would have been a simple matter to telephone Cromwell now at his London office to postpone the appointment to another time and another day. But he could have found no words to explain this action to Elizabeth and to Barbara; no justification, seeing that it would be likely to prejudice their meeting. From something his mother had told him of the man, or else from some long-ago childhood observation he knew this to be true. Elizabeth had received his first suggestion with obvious dismay anticipating, it seemed to Gyp, a rebuff from Cromwell. She had been in her way triumphant to report the success of her call. Gyp guessed already that Cromwell's willingness to see him was no more than a concession to a friendship now half forgotten; a concession not made lightly and not made twice over, unless the man had altered with age. Cromwell, striding from room to room in his tight blue suit, had made no concessions to anybody, not even to Elizabeth, though it was for her sake that he had come to Sagastrand then.

He wished with an intensity and passion foreign to him, pacing the silence of the study or hurrying with great strides along the sands below the cliffs as though he fled something, that he might turn to his brother and tell him, seeking advice from outside the spell of madness which confined all his thoughts. He would not risk a letter, he thought, it was too late for a letter. A word to Barbara or Penny—they would have gone, either of them, to Lucia with a message. They would both have kept their silence, even Penny. But even in their silence he would find questions. And these he could not answer. Even to himself he could not answer them.

ON Sunday morning Shaun breakfasted late with the Coxes, who, with himself, were now the only guests. They had adjoining tables, drawn together in chilly isolation at one end of the dining-room, which would comfortably have accommodated twenty or thirty more. There was a report in the morning paper concerning Mau Mau activity in Kenya, and Commander Cox questioned Shaun about it, passing the paper across the tables. Shaun answered as best he could, considering that the trouble had broken out when he was already on leave, making up for a lack of knowledge by a great deal of enthusiasm. He had read the report himself the previous evening and had given it a great deal of thought. It had both shocked and—in a sense—excited him, for the place named in the papers was no great distance from his own farm, and he was looking forward to his return with a pleasurable anticipation of trouble. He described the farm and the Kikuyu labour, and spoke of the tribes, and went on to offer his own solution, which was outspoken and blood-thirsty. "Irish," Mrs Cox observed with a flickering smile, and beyond this offered no contribution to the discussion, though Shaun's description of a ritual murder had the effect of making her refuse a second piece of toast. Shaun had, in fact, never witnessed a ritual murder or any other murder, and was merely passing on a club story. But he told it well, and was not reluctant to answer Commander Cox's questions from his imagination.

Commander Cox, disbelieving him, enjoyed his stories nevertheless.

Presently the Coxes retired to their own room and Shaun, left to his own devices, wandered into the hall and out under the porch. Penelope, he knew, would be preparing for church with the rest of the family. He considered a solitary drive along the cliff road, but a thin rain and a grey sky discouraged him. He went into the main drawing-room, where there was a fire, and picked up a magazine, flicking over the pages until he heard the station wagon outside. Aimlessly, he went to the window, welcoming even this much distraction, and saw Elizabeth and Penny come out of the house together, and Gyp already at the wheel. But not Barbara, he thought, and he looked for her, but there were only three of them. They drove off under the dripping trees, and Shaun stood there, his hands in his pockets, whistling between his teeth. He lit a cigarette and threw it in the fire.

He went back to the dining-room. It was cleared and tidied, but there was no one there. The house seemed deserted. In a narrow passage towards the kitchen he came upon the cook Hille at the foot of the backstairs. He called to her and she turned her head and said good morning like a parrot, and blinked at him.

"Know where Mrs Paris is?" Shaun asked her.

"Mrs Paris is"—Hille hesitated momentarily—"to the church."

Shaun made a gesture of impatience. "No—damn——" He remembered that Barbara's name wasn't Paris. "Mrs . . . the young Mrs."

"The young Missus?"

"Yes."

"*Entschuldige*," Hille said. "*Verstehe nicht*."

"Never mind," Shaun said, and seeing that this perplexed her more than ever, he said very carefully: "*Vous parlez français?*"

"*Mais si!*"

She spoke an execrable, slangy French, and at a speed which made it quite impossible for Shaun to understand a word. The young Missus, *la jeune, die Kleine?* "To the church also, *nicht wahr?*" And holding one finger raised, Hille said: "Wait please. I call Gill." It was her answer to everything.

"It doesn't matter," Shaun said, but Gill came all the same before he could escape. Gill was not much quicker than Hille, but at last he understood. Mrs Connor was in the office, off the hall.

"Thank you," Shaun said to Gill. "I wanted to see about my account."

Gill said nothing, and Shaun was immediately furious with himself that he had offered an explanation. He turned his back on the two servants, sensing their curious eyes on him, imagining their discussion when he was gone. Beyond all reason he was irritated by that stupid bitch of a German and the idiot boy. God! How could anyone expect to run a hotel with servants like that?

It was some little time before he knocked on the study door. Barbara answered and he went in. He had not been in this room before, and he looked about him curiously, at the wide bay of the window and the small panes, the heavy mantel above the fire. Barbara was at the desk with her back to him. Without turning she said: "Hello, Shaun . . . bored?" The pen in her hand went on writing audibly on a white paper.

The condescension annoyed him. He considered for a moment maintaining the pretence that it was of his

account that he wished to speak. Then he said sullenly: "I've got a complaint."

"Yes?" She stopped writing and turned round.

"Your cook was rude to me."

"Hille?" Barbara looked alarmed. "What did she say?"

Shaun said heavily: "I haven't the least idea."

Barbara laughed. "Well, it's your own fault. What were you doing in the kitchen?"

Is that the way, Shaun asked her, to speak to a guest? but smiling, and Barbara told him that she had forgotten he was a guest. "So has Penny, I'm sure."

Sly, he thought, sly. "Why aren't you in church?"

"I went to communion early. Why aren't you?"

"Catholic," Shaun said promptly.

She might have told him that there was a Catholic church at no great distance, twenty minutes in his car, but probably he knew this. And she doubted if he was a Catholic.

"Are you busy?" he said.

"No——" She threw her pen down.

To ward off a familiar depression of spirit she had been engaged in an unnecessary letter to Kay. It was for herself, not for Kay, that she had been writing, trying to resolve some complexity in herself, the mood of depression, the sense of dread, as if it might be discounted in her deliberately cheerful account of their lives here. She had been telling Kay in her letter of the manner in which she must behave with Jonathan, thinking that soon they would both be here. But Kay would know of herself without being told. Perhaps, child, she would know better of herself. It was of no importance. Barbara's pen lay across the page where she had left it. It was true that she had attended communion

service, but she had not taken the bread or the wine. She had not gone forward to the family pew, she had slipped quietly into a seat at the back by herself unnoticed, and when the congregation stirred and here and there people rose and filed into the aisles, she remained where she was, kneeling. A sense of her inadequacy filled her to despair; unresolved conflicts not shared by the subdued men and women who moved quietly towards the altar prevented her from taking the sacrament. These people were humble and confident, she was neither humble nor confident; in ignorance of the name or nature of her own transgressions, there was no propitiation she could ask at the altar there.

"I'm not interfering with your work?" Shaun persisted. It did not occur to him that she was glad of his company. The noisy explanations with Hille and Gill had unsettled him. Half expecting a rebuff, he was anxious to avoid it. And then, watching for a hint in her face, he said quickly: "Ah, that's better."

"Better?"

"You're smiling."

She averted her face but the lift of the dark brow was still there, the humorous, sceptical curve of her mouth. "Am I?"

"Well, in a way. Mischievous, like a . . ."

"Like a——?" She turned back to him, curious to learn what she was like to Shaun.

"A leprechaun," he told her.

She laughed, and then burst out laughing. Shaun grinned and thrust a hand through his fair hair, pleased and surprised to find the pleasantry so well received. But she laughed more at herself. Because she had instinctively sought his meaning at another level. Imputing to Shaun—to Shaun! of all people—intelligence

enough or perception enough to add to her store of self-knowledge. But a moment later he surprised her.

"A leprechaun," she said. "They are credited with a spiteful nature, I believe."

"Ah, not if you know the little fellows. But they can find buried treasure, didn't you know that?"

She had not known, and seeing her in her mind still questioning the parallel he said:

"And isn't that you exactly?—for ever looking for what is buried deep down inside people?"

It was far enough from the truth to catch her interest; close enough to make her withdraw. She said laconically: "Treasure?"

"Where your treasure is," he reminded her, "there will your heart be also."

This was clever and frightened her. He saw it, but he did not understand it. He said: "What is it?"

"For a moment," she said, "just for a moment you reminded me of someone."

"Who?—not your brother!"

She did not correct Shaun. She said at random: "There's a fire in the lounge you know." She stood up and began to tidy the desk.

"I was thinking of a stroll," Shaun said, and stopped. They both knew that this was not all. Both waited on the other to speak. Then Barbara said:

"You want me to come?"

"You wouldn't mind?" It sounded too grateful. He added: "I mean, it is raining, you know."

But not heavily. Beyond the lattice was the same grey drizzle, a fine rain falling straight to the earth with no wind to drive it in against the glass, under the eaves. Barbara said: "I'll get my coat." She passed in front of him through the door, crossed the hall and vanished

through a second door. Shaun fetched his own coat down from his room and pulled it on while he waited for her, just inside the porch. It was a fawn, military trench-coat with obscure brass rings on the belt, and epaulettes. Because he left it unbelted and the leather buttons unfastened it made him look casual and rakish, not military. He knew this. It was an attitude partly natural to him; partly adopted now from a sense of rebellion, an awareness of the humble part he had taken with this woman; and from that an indistinct wish to offend her—just a little. For Barbara was always careful in her dress, always tidy, a great lover he supposed of tidiness. He was lighting a cigarette when he heard the frou-frou of her skirts behind him and turned.

But perhaps she in her turn had studied him, for she had changed her court shoes for crêpe-soled brogues with no shine to them, and she wore an old black rain-coat faded almost to a dark green. It was this, not silk or taffeta, that rustled when she came down the hall. Before they went out into the rain she took a square of black silk from a pocket and threw it over her head, making a knot under her pointed chin. If he had not known, he would not have recognised her.

She went a little in front of him; with a certain reserve of manner again; or perhaps with a haste to be away from the overlooking windows—he could not be sure of this, or of anything, or of himself. She turned once in the carriage-way to know the direction. His mouth rounded in indecision: wherever she wished. She turned at once to the cliffs, and he came up in silence beside her. In a moment the roofs and turrets of Sagastrand dropped back behind the dripping trees, and they were quite suddenly alone. Out on the cliffs the wind flew stronger, bending the grasses and shaking Gyp's new fence, driving the rain obliquely against

their exposed faces and hands and chilling them. They kept their heads bent against it, and this compelled them to silence. Turning to speak to her, Shaun lost the words he had prepared in the discovery that she was further from him than before, though her sleeve brushed his and her coat flapped against his own knee. There was no expression in her face, no acknowledgement of his presence. Sullen, he spoke. He made a random remark about the rain and discovered immediately that it was foolish. Barbara merely nodded; perhaps without properly hearing.

They passed single-file through the new wicket-gate in the fence where now steps went twisting down to the sands. The steps, which had been cut square and shallow, had been already washed loose by so much rain, and were slippery. Shaun took Barbara's arm and then, suddenly and curiously shaken, caught her close to him as they descended. He had held her sister so, many times. Penelope's arms were firmly fleshed, and in their plumpness, strong; Barbara's, through the damp stuff of her sleeve, were unexpectedly fragile. He had believed her to be tall, but the wetness of the scarf over her hair came no higher than his chin. Because he held her in to his side it made their steps awkward, but he would not let her go. He kissed her, bending his head. She lifted her face automatically to make it easier for him, and her lips in the rain were cold. Her hands were in the pockets of her raincoat, she did not embrace him, and though she stood, and he might have kissed her again, he did not. When they came down to the level of the sands they walked apart as before.

They made conversation now, as they walked midway between the cliffs and the sea. Barbara pointed out the dark caves as they passed them and told him that these were supposed to have been used by smugglers,

and Shaun looked up at the caves without noticing them and nodded, having heard the story often enough before. Gill's great-great grandfather was said to have been taken here, she told him, and was afterwards hanged. They watched a ship pass far out, obscured by the rain. Shaun lit a cigarette but the rain wetted it and he was obliged to throw it away. It was Barbara for the most part who talked, he merely answered her and agreed. Half a mile beyond the caves she slowed and drew back her sleeve to see the time. "I think we should be getting back now." Shaun wheeled about like a soldier on a command and stood slackly waiting for her. She said, as though from a great distance, her voice was so quiet: "I'm sorry, Shaun." Walking back over the twin tracks of their own footprints, she slipped an arm through his.

The force of the wind increased without warning, and with it came a heavier, drenching rain. They began to run, making for the lee of the cliffs, but it afforded them little shelter. Shaun buttoned his coat and shook his head, shaking the drops from his hair. Already the skirts of their coats were sodden and clung round their legs, hindering them. They ran for the caves and scrambled up into the first, Shaun going up and helping Barbara after him. Inside, under the rock face, the noise of the rain and the sea was muted, their voices loud, echoing away into darkness behind them.

"It will blow over," Shaun said. "In a few minutes."

"Yes, I think so."

They brushed their coats down with their hands, and Barbara took the square from her head and shook it out. The lip of the cave held numerous pools of water, but inside, where the floor sloped to a hollow, it was quite dry. Shaun lit another cigarette and while the match burned walked back a little way. The cave narrowed

and turned to the right, but the match burned out without showing the end. Most of the caves ran only a short way before a fall of rock barred them.

"Have you a comb?" Barbara asked.

It was a moment before he found it, inside his trench-coat.

"Shaun," Barbara said. "I am sorry."

"Why?" he asked, though he knew why.

She was combing her hair forward, tossing her head.

"It hasn't worked, has it?"

He said deliberately: "Oh, I don't know. I dare say you've had your amusement."

"My——"

"The pleasure," he said viciously, "of seeing me make a bloody fool of myself. Isn't that enough? I don't know."

She looked suddenly very small, her black coat making no contrast against the shadows where she stood, only the pale oval of her face. She said clearly:

"It should have been me. I should have made a bloody fool of myself—not you. That's right, isn't it?"

It was exactly true. He shouted at her: "Shut up!" One stride brought him close to her, face to face. She was standing against the wall of the cave, one shoulder listlessly rested, her hands deep in the pockets of her raincoat as before. Before she could withdraw them he had pinioned her arms close within his, driving her back with his full weight to the wall with a furious urgency as if he would prevent her escaping, though she offered no resistance. He searched every part of her face with fierce, angry kisses: her eyes, her wet hair, her throat, bruising her lips. She moved a little and he held her. Her temple he kissed, and the lobe of her ear; and she jerked abruptly away, turning her face this way and that, and would have wrenched herself free of him and could not. Her arms trembled violently and her hands,

enmeshed in the pockets of her own coat, struggled to be free. He loosened the top button of her raincoat under her chin and then a second, and to do this released her, and her hands came free of her coat and went about his neck. She pulled herself to him, hiding her face and the knowledge of what he did. When her coat fell open at last he drew her down into the hollow, inside the lip of the cave, where the light flashed back from the mirror-pools, the window of light sky outside, the twilight within like a cloister, like a crypt; the light that crossed his own face and veiled hers with shadow. But he knew she watched him. And yet, when he came close into her shadow and found her, her eyes were closed, the dark lashes very fine against her cheek.

A single pool like a tear came into his vision, the bright curve of the sky within the arc of the cave mouth, the sky in the pool, a little blue. Regarding these things, it came to him now that the rain had ceased altogether, and there was a silence in place of the pattering of the rain on that lip of rock. He shifted, taking his weight on to one elbow, his chin in his hand; and the ticking of his wrist-watch was audible. "I thought," he said, and stopped. "You're a funny girl."

He knew that she slipped away, stood up and moved behind him.

"What happens now?" Shaun said, almost to himself. "Are we friends? Lovers?—no. Do we go back to the house and go on being polite to each other? Do you know what I think?" He swung round accusingly. "I think you don't care." Barbara was buckling the belt of her coat, her head bent over it. "Do you?" he said. "Do you."

"No."

He said more slowly: "Where is the other Barbara?"

So darned superior, so remote, looking at everybody through a microscope. What happened to you? I don't know. Put on low-heeled shoes and a shabby rain-coat——"

"I'm sorry it's shabby," Barbara said. "It's Penny's, by the way."

It seemed to him so monstrous that he cried out:

"Penny's!"

"Yes. Does that bother you? It was the first I could find. We take the same size in everything, coats, shoes, gloves. We often borrow each other's clothes."

She came up to the mouth of the cave and extended a bare hand palm up, seeing that the rain had stopped. She stood there, watching the breakers on the sand until Shaun came and helped her down over the rock. Their old footprints, passing the cave and returning, were curiously flattened and shallow. "They will be back from church," Barbara said. "You had better go on round by the harbour, I'll go straight up. I'll go in the back way, but give me half an hour at least."

Presently Shaun said uncertainly: "You know when we came out . . . together . . . I thought you were going to lecture me. About Penny. I was prepared for a sermon!" He was unable to laugh.

"I don't think it's important enough," Barbara said, "for a sermon."

Not even the knowledge of his own betrayal could blind Shaun to the injustice of this. He asked with amazement and horror: "You mean Penny's unimportant? She doesn't matter?"

In a flat voice, dulled with his blindness and stupidity, Barbara answered him:

"After all, what a fool you are, Shaun. Of course Penny matters. It's us, Shaun, you and me, who don't matter."

THREE days later, on the Wednesday, Shaun left.

On Monday, in spite of what he had previously told Gyp, he had had no thought of leaving yet; on Wednesday he had no choice.

Are we friends? he had asked Barbara. What happens now? Lovers? No—though his eyes hunted and trapped hers again and again, across the lounge, across the table when he took a meal with the family, when they passed in and about the house, when she opened a door or came down the stairs above him—it was as though nothing had passed between them. He claimed it, and she did not disallow his claim, she ignored it. He had no opportunity of speaking with her, perhaps by chance. But he did not think it was by chance. He paused at a door to wait for her and she did not come, or came with Gyp, or her mother, or following a servant with household instructions, or Penny was there; but usually it was Penny. Penny saw no change in him, she sought his company always; as before. And then, when he turned to Penny, suggesting a drive or a stroll in the evening air, it seemed to him that Barbara watched with no expression. When they left the house, he sensed Barbara invisible behind every window.

He knew, in the end, that Barbara had tricked him; and perhaps doubly tricked him. Though it was abundantly clear that he was nothing to her—and the reverse, when he considered it, he believed equally true—yet she somehow contrived in her silence to make it

intolerable for him to be with Penny as before. Not Penny. It's us, Shaun, you and me, who don't matter.

He spoke privately with Gyp late on the Tuesday evening, going into the office long after the rest of the hotel had retired. He had heard Gyp's steps pacing the length and breadth of the room, worried, he guessed, with the failure of the hotel which was now so plain that even Gyp could not shut his eyes to it any longer. When he went in he found Gyp curiously dishevelled, as though from a prolonged lack of sleep. Gyp said nothing, drew up his account, gave him a receipt, shook his hand and wished him well—but as a stranger.

Shaun had considered with detailed care what he would say to Penny, but at the last his courage forsook him. He packed that night, set his own alarm clock for five and the following morning was ready to leave before even the servants came down. He stacked his cases in his car, and came back into the house to hang his front door and room keys on the rack at the end of the hall. Then, when he was already halfway down the hall again, he turned on a sudden impulse and went quickly up the stairs to Barbara's room. Because the curtains were a little parted the room was not quite in darkness. Her head was cradled on one slender arm that curled under jet hair on the white pillow, her face turned away from him even, he thought bitterly, in sleep. He moved a hand to that bare flesh to awaken her with a caution to silence, an assurance against her alarm. His fingers brushed something and took it up gently, a photograph in a leather case which must have slipped from her hand as she turned in sleep. Shaun opened the case and thought for a moment that it was a photograph of himself, the likeness was so apparent. And then, searching his memory, he recalled another photograph

somewhere in the house, tucked forgotten into a drawer in a bureau and disturbed when he had needed writing paper. A group on a beach, not this beach here at Cravenmere, France perhaps. Barbara and the child Kay, and this man who must have been her husband.

He dropped the case, shut the door behind him and ran back down the wishbone-staircase careless of the noise he made. He had taken a particular pride in his car. Even in the cold morning it started at once. He drove furiously down the carriage-way, flew between the stone pillars as if pursued, taking with him in some rejected corner of his mind the knowledge that in the house behind him a window opened; not asking himself, even, whose window it was.

On Thursday Gyp went into Croxton to meet Cromwell, scarcely conscious of the silence that he left behind him in the house. To him now, Shanon's going was another guest gone, and in that a last unnecessary spur driving him headlong, warning him against a deviation in his purpose. He was to be at Cromwell's house at half-past six. At seven, according to the arrangement they had made the previous week, he should be dining with Lucia at her hotel in Croxton. There was no way of letting her know, none.

From a quarter-past six until half-past he was at the hotel, though this would make him late for Cromwell, watching the stairs and the lift, passing through the upstairs lounge in the desperate belief that she would somehow come this much early, but she did not come.

Before he left the hotel he spoke to the woman behind the reception desk in the lobby. He requested awkwardly that if anyone asked for him would she please explain that he had been called away suddenly, un-

avoidably. And when the receptionist asked him if he was expecting anyone Gyp said No, because if he had said Yes she would have asked the name, pencil poised over the memorandum pad, and he did not know the name.

He waited a further five minutes outside in the street by the station wagon. At twenty-five to seven he left.

At five minutes past the hour Lucia entered the lounge. She glanced about her, and took a chair close by the door. She lit a cigarette and began to watch the people who came up the stairs, and when the lift doors opened each time, she raised her head.

Cromwell's house, black-and-white, half-timbered, stood at the head of a narrow lane that went up between high banks, in a cleft overhung with trees. It was three miles out of the town. There were houses on both sides of the lane well back from it, but Cromwell's, like the rest, withdrew behind high evergreen hedges from its neighbours. Shingle under the wheels of the station wagon announced Gyp's arrival before he rang the bell. A servant admitted him at once. He waited for Cromwell in a long drawing-room: chairs and tables, bookshelves and low chest of the same dark-grained wood. It was not yet dark. The central chandelier was unlit. Wall-lights, touched on polish and sheen within the room, but the curtains were undrawn; the graceful tracery of a silver birch was etched in the window on a greying sky.

The persistent ticking of a clock recalled Gyp to the room. He glanced at the pictures and the books, but these ran in unbroken lines across the width of the shelves, uniform in binding and format, the choice of a book club not of the individual man; they told him

nothing of Cromwell. The room was too neat: cushions on sofa and chairs alike were stretched to a taut, convex curve as if no one ever sat in them or no one dared; the chairs, drawn into an almost geometrical pattern, showed nothing except that he kept excellent servants. The clock was a tall box in one corner, dark wood and gilded roman figures dim in the shadow. Lucia also, he thought, would be watching a clock at this moment.

Cromwell, entering briskly and wringing his hand, held the thought off.

Gyp found little change in him. Memory held his image in just this pattern: his face full and florid, brows white now but still thick, the eyes fiercely blue and shrewd, giving him a choleric look. He had that rather overwhelming personality not uncommon among the successful and affluent but surprising, perhaps, in a man of small beginnings—a sort of magnificent disregard of the fact that not everyone was able or accustomed to think at his financial level.

“You don’t remember me?” he asked Gyp.

Gyp made some answer.

Like many other successful business men, Cromwell was a poor judge of character but a shrewd judge of mood. He could not tell from meeting a man if he was dishonest or impetuous, but he could detect precisely the degree of enthusiasm or reluctance, warmth or distrust in a buyer. While Gyp answered his questions about the family, and he was busy with glasses and decanter, he became aware of two things about his visitor: first that he was ill at ease, which might be explained by the fact that he had come—Cromwell had guessed from Elizabeth’s message—to ask a favour; and second, that this was not the reason.

He drank nothing himself but poured water into a

tumbler and swallowed a white powder from a folded slip of paper. "Headache," he explained, and winced at the taste. "I get these damned attacks. This has been building up all day."

"A migraine?" Gyp asked, and when Cromwell said Yes, a migraine, he added with sympathy: "I get them myself."

"Do you?"

Cromwell studied him. His eyes wandered, checked, and he smiled abruptly in apology.

"Gyp—do they still call you Gyp?"

"Yes."

"An accountant, I believe?"

"Yes, I was."

"Ah." Cromwell looked at him. "Qualified of course? Yes, hmm. Ever think of going back to accountancy?"

Gyp answered that he had not.

"No? Pity, pity. As a matter of fact I could offer you something myself. I shall be needing a qualified man very shortly, my accountant is going to Canada."

"Thank you," Gyp said.

"You're not married?"

"No."

"Then——?"

Gyp said: "It's very kind of you."

When they went in to dinner the clock in the corner of the drawing-room said ten past seven.

During the meal Cromwell encouraged Gyp to talk, and, at last, finding him plunged in some abstraction of his own, said outright: "You have a proposition for me I believe? Fine—let's hear it. You don't mind discussing business over a meal table? All nonsense! I've handled some of my biggest contracts over a good chartreuse." He listened while Gyp told him of the hotel,

outlining the scheme for a country club. He nodded, breaking his roll in his fingers, turning his glass, fingering his signet ring. He heard the details of Gyp's plan and shot quick questions at him, but gave no hint of his own views until they were back in the lounge.

Gyp glanced at the clock again, and now the hands stood on the hour, eight. and he thought: by now she will have left.

Cromwell said: "I'll be quite frank with you, Gyp."

I'll be quite frank with you, Lucia. This is no use, I was wrong, I was wrong.

"This country club idea," Cromwell said, "may be quite a sound proposition, I dare say it is. But to my way of thinking you're making a mistake right from the word go. What is there in it for you? Nothing!—if you see what I mean." He made a loose gesture with his hand. "Oh, yes, I know you're thinking of Jonathan, of your brother, the family, not yourself. But this is business, isn't it, after all? And I don't have to tell you . . ."

I don't have to tell you there is no room in business for sentiment. No room in business, no room anywhere else, Lucia.

Cromwell's voice continued. "You have to think of number one," he was saying now. It was evident that he was disclosing the maxims by which he lived. "Your greatest obligation is to yourself—make no mistake about it! You're young, full of ideals. I was the same myself at your age . . . my wife passed away, you know . . ."

Gyp scarcely heeded him, noting only the irrelevant details of his speech, his mannerisms, and this euphemism that came so curiously from his mouth, that she passed away and never died at all. Jonathan, he thought, would enjoy that. Jonathan was a great collector of euphemisms.

"When you get to my age you'll know it's true what I say. People don't thank you for helping them in this life. Gratitude doesn't come naturally to self-respecting men and women. That's why America is so unpopular in a way, and why Britain used to be. No one likes to be under an obligation to somebody else. *I don't. Do you?*"

"No," Gyp said.

"You see what I mean?"

"I suppose," Gyp said, "you mean you aren't prepared to finance my scheme."

There was a long moment of silence.

"Not at all," Cromwell said at last. "Not at all." The humorous twist to his mouth was very pronounced. "I shall have to know a great deal more about it before I can make a decision. If you are really sure you want to go on with it the best thing you can do is to get it down in writing. Let me have the figures, the overall construction costs, the land, the estimated return."

"I have them here," Gyp said.

Cromwell blinked at him; then smiled. "Ah. I see." He took the envelope which Gyp produced from the inside pocket of his coat, and dropped it on to the table beside his chair. "Tell me, Gyp. Was this your idea or Jonathan's?"

"Mine," Gyp said.

"I see. Well, it's quite sound, I'm sure——"

The opening of a door interrupted them, and both turned towards the sound. Lucia came into the room.

She wore a light coat of blue taffeta, a white stock at her throat. She looked at Gyp for an instant; for an instant remained motionless in the dark-wood frame of the doorway; then turned to Cromwell with her quick smile. Both men stood up.

"My daughter," Cromwell said. He said to Lucia,

"This is Mr Paris, dear. From Sagastrand, you may remember?"

"Oh, but we have met." Her smile included Gyp, but briefly, he could read nothing in her smile. Cromwell's rapid, calculating appraisal went from one to the other. Lucia began to take off her coat. Underneath she wore a neat dress of the same blue, white-trimmed. In answer to her father's questions she said that she had already dined, wanted nothing; she was tired, however, and would leave them in a moment to their business.

The room, before she entered it, had seemed to Gyp sombre and unused: the sighing of the birch tree outside the window, the sad ticking of the clock in the corner. It seemed as if it had been waiting only for her arrival to come to life. He told himself that it was nothing but the chairs drawn together breaking up that lifeless pattern, the chink and glitter of glasses, the blue-grey wisps of tobacco smoke climbing up among the chandelier lights, the warmth of human voices. But without Lucia he knew these things would have counted for nothing, nothing.

Cromwell, too, was changed. He became affable, genial, teasing Lucia for her beaux. She had a ready answer for him each time, charging him with dullness, with his unending business, business, business. It was obvious that he was very proud of her. She retired after a few minutes chatter, carrying her coat through the door and leaving them.

For a moment neither spoke. Then Cromwell said suddenly, tapping cigarette ash into a tray: "I hadn't realised that you were acquainted with my daughter, Gyp."

Gyp said: "She was good enough to have dinner with me one evening."

"Ah!"

Now Cromwell held the report which Gyp had given him balanced in his hand.

Balanced indeed.

"You're a young man, Gyp. Lucia's a damned attractive girl. Don't think I'm blaming you. Don't think I'm blaming you in the least."

Gyp said simply: "I don't understand."

"Simple enough:" Cromwell said. "I would consider it a favour, Gyp, for . . . reasons . . . I don't particularly want to go into now—but there *are* reasons—if you didn't see Lucia again. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly," Gyp said.

And he took the report out of Cromwell's hand, tore it across and dropped it on the table. Then he walked out of the house.

In retrospect, this evening was intolerably confused in his mind. So, conceivably, might a man enter a dark tunnel and find himself beset, and fight through somehow and emerge at the end knowing neither what manner of thing it was that attacked him, nor whether he had vanquished it or not. Cromwell's personal heavy-handed maxims, his obvious interest in Gyp and his work; Lucia's pale loveliness in the dark frame of the doorway, the white ruff at her throat; the ill-disguised bargain or threat—these, with the sighing of the birch and the clinking of the glasses, were scraps only of a broken pattern, with no sequence save that of minute upon minute, the ticking of the clock in the corner. It was inconceivable that Cromwell had in truth made so childish a threat, yet also true. There was no subtlety in the man, no ambiguity; words and meaning were blatant. Yet a moment before, Cromwell had been

chaffing Lucia for her many beaux. There was no reason, Gyp thought, no reason; the man is mad.

Not until he came to write to Jonathan, to tell of his own part, did he realise the enormity of his own betrayal. He told no one else. To Elizabeth and Barbara, who had waited late at Sagastrand for his news, he said only that he had had no success. They had questioned him no further, carrying their separate disappointments privately to their own rooms; or perhaps for comparison later between themselves. Penelope had not been present, for her concern over Shaun's flight monopolised her grief and wrapped her in a personal loneliness no one could yet pierce. She had made herself ill enough to excuse her complete withdrawal to her room and bed.

Now, writing to Jonathan as he wrote daily, telling him of these things that had taken place, Gyp faltered. He tried to recapture the intimacy of brother to brother, and failed entirely; as he had failed once before when first he had tried to write of Lucia. For two hours he sat at his desk, beginning letters and destroying them and beginning again.

The following day, behind the locked doors of the panelled study, he telephoned Lucia five times. Four times a servant answered, but the fifth gave him another number. "Vaughan," a man said, and then: "Hang on. I'll call her." Then Lucia's voice, unchanged—somehow he had thought to hear it changed. He made his own voice calm and level, driving his elbow hard down on the wood of the desk, fighting down the sick anxiety that threatened him, speaking slowly, normally.

"This is Gyp," he said.

"Gyp? Oh! Yes?"

"Lucia, I'm terribly sorry."

There was no answer.

He said again: "Lucia—"

"Yes? What happened? I sat there till half-past seven, breaking cigarettes into small pieces and eating them."

"I'm terribly sorry. I had an appointment with your father . . . it was arranged very suddenly, it was vitally important. Not for myself . . ."

"That's all right," Lucia said. "But why didn't you let me know?"

"I couldn't. I didn't know your name."

He heard her laugh.

"No, of course!"

"You're not angry?"

"Angry? Oh, no."

Gyp said: "Can we try again?" and waited for her answer. But she said nothing. He said: "Is anything the matter?"

He heard her say: "It's no good, Gyp."

Her voice was faint as though the line was bad, as though she spoke from very far away or long ago.

Yes, now he was sick. It is the heart, they will tell you; but it isn't the heart, it's the stomach; here, in the pit of the stomach that the sickness comes. Not a pain, not a pain quite, only a numbness; paralysing, wordless. Of all the ways of expressing it words are the least adequate, it has no language.

"Lucia—I must see you again."

"No, Gyp."

Very gentle her voice; very kind.

"Lucia . . ."

So he might lean on the desk repeating her name, his elbow on the wood; so a man might call Lord, Lord, from hell itself.

"It's no use."

"I . . . don't . . . understand."

He had said it to Cromwell not many hours ago, I don't understand, I don't understand.

Kindly she said: "Didn't Father tell you?"

"He spoke to me——"

"Then you know——"

"Nothing!" he cried. "Except that I was coolly instructed not to see you again."

"But he said *why*?"

"I told you, no!"

He thought she had gone. But at last her voice came again, careful, calculating; as if she had been thinking hard. "Where are you speaking from?"

"Sagastrand."

"I will meet you in Croxton in . . . an hour. At that hotel. Yes? But it will be the last time, Gyp. And I can't stay."

But he was with her, after all, for more than an hour. She refused to meet him again or to discuss any future meeting, dismissing his pleading with a quick excuse turned gaily; refusing utterly to be drawn into his mood, refusing to leave off the pretence that there had been nothing between them. He saw that she had made up her mind; she had prepared herself for this meeting, putting on another dress and another face, coming to him another person entirely; light in her talk, gay in her manner—smiling. She reproached him for his seriousness.

"I meant this to be a sort of gay good-bye! A last drink together, Gyp."

And she raised her glass, laughing.

"You know," he said quietly, "that I am in love with you."

She nodded. "Yes. Perhaps that's why . . . It's no use, Gyp. It's never any use . . ."

She was unable to continue, but he understood her.

"You are lying to me," he said. "Why? What has happened to you——?"

"Nothing!" she said quickly. "Don't you see? Gyp . . ."

In this quarrel he won at last, sweeping aside her easy pretences; she refused to be serious but by his intensity he made her so. And she became grave, her face was pale, he had never seen her so pale. Her voice dropped. "Gyp, it was *then* I was lying . . . not now. Gyp, there's nothing behind all this . . . nothing! I've never told anyone that before. I'm no good for you, Gyp."

He said: "Do you think I couldn't make you happy?"

She was unwilling to say this.

"I would never make *you* happy," she said.

In her way she offered him consolation, telling him of herself, that she had once loved a man, an idyllic love, transcending life and all its meanings. The ~~man~~, the boy, died suddenly in the war; he was not killed, he died of blood-poisoning in Burma at a headquarter base well behind the lines. You get over it, she told Gyp, you do get over it, it is like a flame that sears and cleanses. What will you do? he asked her; and she said with a return to her light manner, I shall marry. The first person who makes me an offer. I am sick of this, Gyp, sick of it.

But so much talent! he cried; and she said smiling, no, for what? And he told her, for life itself, you have so much; but she disbelieved him, not understanding, supposing that it was of her beauty that he spoke.

"I'm sorry, Gyp," she said over and over again. "I am sorry.

"I don't quite know how to say this. My father knew

your mother before she was married. They were engaged to be married once—did you know that? He was very fond of her . . . and she of him . . . but . . . your . . . Gyp.”

He broke in curtly: “What are you trying to tell me?”

“I am your sister, Gyp. Your half-sister.”

Long after Lucia had gone he sat there drinking, until by unending repetition the thing assumed the guise of truth, or near-truth. Armistice night, November nineteen-eighteen; they were to be married and the war was over and he was safe, who could cast a stone and blame them, save only with a foreknowledge of the future? Elizabeth had married Paris within three weeks. He himself was born the following August. Cromwell was not sure, no one, probably, could be sure—Paris, had he known or guessed? It was not impossible, as Gyp had first claimed.

There was no resemblance, nothing.

Cromwell suffered from the migraine also, was this hereditary?

He drove very slowly back to Cravenmere because he was a little drunk and did not trust himself to drive fast. He met no one at the house or on the cliffs. He stood looking down at those rocks, the complicated whorls of green water in and out of the rocks. He sat on the damp turf beyond the fence, between the palings and the cliff edge. His hand in the grass found a ragged edge of rock and worked it loose. I am sick of this, Gyp, sick of it. Christ. Ah, dear Christ.

A jet aircraft went screaming across the sky above him like a blasphemy.

He stood up to watch it. The piece of rock was still in his hand, he became aware of its sharpness in his fist.

It had cut his palm a little; there was a little blood. Now the tears ran unashamed down his cheeks, the rocks and the waves swam into one, blurred and formless. If I love you, what is that to you? And he remembered with a sudden clearness of thought Emerson, a passage he had scored sometime, years ago, maybe, and underlined in wonder then: *not you but your radiance, a part of yourself you do not and cannot know or understand.*

He hurled the rock with all his strength far into the water he could no longer see below him. Half-sister, sister, his own flesh—what are these things to me now?

"I don't *care*!" he shouted.

Perhaps from one of the caves below, caught by the wind, echoing from the rock itself, the words came back to him. I don't *care*.

Barbara met him in the house, too impatient with her news at first to notice his face.

"Gyp! I've been looking for you everywhere. Where have you been?" And before he could answer her, she said: "Penny's gone."

"Gone?"

"She must have left early this morning and walked down to the station. She's taken some of her clothes, her night things—oh, the little idiot!" Impatient with his slowness she cried: "Don't you *see*? The little fool has gone after Shaun. He must have arranged it with her, he left a note for her when he left. Gyp, Gyp, you must stop them!"

"How?" Gyp asked. "Where did Shaun go?"

But no one knew this. Shaun had left by car, there was no way of telling where he had gone. There was no address in the register where he had signed on arrival save that of the farm in Kenya.

"Are you ill?" Barbara said suddenly.

Gyp turned away to the stairs. "Headache," he said. "I'll be all right presently."

Later in the morning Elizabeth came to his room to say that Jonathan had telephoned. Penelope was with him. He was bringing her down to Sagastrand with him the next day.

PART TWO

Jonathan's Story

OCTOBER the 27th, late October and the fall of the year. It is now three days since I came to Sagastrand again.

The trees up to the house were dropping I suppose the last of their leaves audibly along the carriage-way, making it loose and restless to walk—a wild scattering quite unlike the formal, crisp tread of gravel that I had remembered. As the way continued on and up, the noise of the sea came closer, but not loud, that far-running, roaring sound which as children we made for ourselves by cupping our hands hard over our ears. The wind on the right side of my face had all the sharpness and the salt of it. The fallen leaves lay everywhere underfoot, my shoes and my stick gave back only their rustling. At first there was a ridge or a small bank bordering the carriage-way, but this presently dropped to the same level and I lost it altogether. Penelope said: “Jonathan,” and her voice was well to my left and I knew I was wrong, and stopped.

“Here,” Penelope said.

She has this sense, my sister, that so few have: an instinctive perception of my disability which enables her to know how little is needed. Kay has it, but Barbara hasn’t, nor has my mother. Gyp, meeting our train at Croxton that afternoon, had thrust his broad, hard-fleshed hand into mine with a solicitous gentleness which in itself was amusing since my hands, from so many years at the piano, are no less strong than his own. But from that moment, changing his grip to my arm

above the elbow, he held me in arrest, guiding me right and left across the station, between cars to the station wagon, jostling me kindly into a seat, fastening the door securely as if afraid that I should fall out. Then he left me sweating with anger, and went back for the luggage.

Penelope said very little during the drive. She had exchanged only a few words with Gyp. She had left, she had come back, this was self-evident. There was nothing more to say. And Gyp himself presently relapsed into a dull, rather a depressed silence, rousing himself now and again to mention something of the way-side, but with none of that vivid, almost poetic description he sometimes uses, and which no stranger would ever understand in him. We are passing this and that, he said, you remember? Do you remember? But I remembered very little. Croxton streets, so many years ago they must have changed every aspect; a certain lane under trees; the beech tree which Gyp said was now cut down. For long stretches there was nothing, and in imagination I passed the fallen beech tree two and three times more, at will, for amusement. When Gyp told me that we were at the gates to Sagastrand I asked him to stop. I sent him on with the luggage to the house, and with Penelope walked up the carriage-way. When I walked off the path Penelope did not come after me and usher me back as Gyp would have done; she spoke my name instead very quietly, and when I stopped she said: "Here," still walking on. It was a simple matter to turn a little towards her voice and catch her up.

There were no leaves in front of the house—there are trees there too. I remembered them and they creaked and altered the tunc of the wind, but the leaves must have been swept clear. Under the porch there was bare

asphalt, hollow-sounding because roofed, and three long steps up to the doors.

Elizabeth and Barbara met us in the hall. They came forward in turn and kissed me, Elizabeth first, warmly, loose tweed and a loose strand of hair; then Barbara, who was merely following her example. Barbara is hostile, I cannot imagine why. She barely touched me. A faint, very delicate, discreet and I should imagine expensive perfume which I remembered very well. She always uses it. I associate it with her perfect clothes and her air of superior remoteness, so I suppose Sagastrand has not changed her at all; she is hopelessly neurotic and still suspicious of everybody and everything.

On entering the house I had from habit memorised the position of the main doorway and kept it squarely behind me, and this, with innumerable small sounds—the timbre of our voices, a door at the end of the hall opening and closed, probably a servant, the perceptible whisper and hiss of an open fire to my right—assisted my memory so that within a few minutes I had formed a composite picture of the hall, its height and length. The twin staircases would be directly in front of me, and above the square landing, where it joined and went up again, the long window, the crest and *resurgam* coloured in the glass.

I remembered it very well now.

It had never struck me before, what an absurd thing the motto *resurgam* is, set halfway up a staircase.

“I’ll show you your room,” Penelope said.

I realised, then, that she had not previously said anything, she had taken no part in the conversation. Poor Penny! She has no conversation of her own, now, that does not lead back to this man Shaun, and she had talked her heart out to me already and had nothing left

for the others. People do talk to me. I suppose it is the notion that they can withhold as much of themselves as they wish. It is so much easier to confess and cry when no one is looking at you—though I hear her crying and Penelope knows I hear her. I hear her breathing, too, and every restless, piteous movement that she makes, but she does not know this. I imagine that most people exchange confidences more readily in the dark. I am sure they do, though I forget.

The tower room has its own stairway which goes nowhere else. Penelope set my hand on the bottom of the handrail and said: "Shall I come up?"

I told her to come up in half an hour. This must have seemed strange to her, but she said nothing. With my hand on the rail I went quickly upstairs. Going upstairs and downstairs are the only two things that I do quickly. The hand, leading on rail or banister, gives ample warning when the stairs curve or end. There is never any furniture on a staircase. I opened the door of the tower room and closed it behind me, and turned the key.

The tower room.

Penelope had assured me that it was the same. Every article of furniture had been replaced. The room was as Paris had left it. As far as I can remember, this is so. Not that it matters.

Paris used to sit *there*, at the piano, a manuscript-score propped up in front of him, a pencil in his teeth, his left hand going over the same run of notes again and again, his right flying between notes, mouth and manuscript. This with a continuous undertone of swearing and laughing—an alarming, impressive, and entirely bogus demonstration of his genius.

Visitors to the room were generally met by this

tableau. It could not have been difficult to arrange. In the tower room you can hear anyone on the stairs long before they reach the door. In my case he knew very well when I was coming, for I came up at fixed times for my lessons. There was seldom any answer to my knock. He was most often at the piano with his back to the door, and affected not to hear me come in. If he kept me standing there too long I used to open the door again and slam it, and then he would spin round and glare at me. There was not much he could say, however, without admitting that he knew I had been there all the time, and he did not like to do this.

He was perfectly sincere about his music. He did compose on occasion some extremely fine pieces. But he composed them very infrequently—too infrequently for the family, who, discovering early that he was inept at nearly everything else, claimed him as a musical genius; and thereafter obliged him to live up to their claim.

On one occasion, my shoes being muddied, I took them off in the hall and went up barefoot and surprised him in one of the easy chairs. After a sullen moment he said: "Do you know what I was doing?"

It was perfectly obvious what he had been doing. Sprawled comfortably in the armchair and—until I disturbed him—sleeping.

Composing, he told me. That's the thing, Jon. Don't think you will find a theme somewhere in the piano. It's here—he tapped his forehead significantly—in the brain.

I laughed, and he clouted me.

He very seldom clouted me. It was equivalent to an admission of defeat, for he had a peculiar horror of violence, and it had the effect of making him angrier than ever. He waved me to the piano and dropped back

into his chair with an air of martyred sufferance which Penelope has sometimes, when she is obliged to do something disagreeable. He bid me play something. Anything? I asked; and he said, any damn thing. So I rushed into the Chopin Polonaise in A flat, which he hated.

It was a favourite of mine at the time. I liked the brave, staccato aggressiveness of it. It was a splendid thing to play in a mood of defiance, very loud. I knew my father hated it because he had told me so only the day before, and said I made it sound like a barrel organ.

The first few bars now were enough to bring him out of his chair in a rush. He slammed the piano closed on my fingers and bundled me out of the room. I never want to hear that bloody thing again as long as I live.

He never did, I think. But when he was dead I played it once more in this room, shaking the dust off the piano with the resounding chords. It was an exhilarating experience, here in this shrouded room where for days no one had spoken above a whisper; it would have made Paris so angry, this Chopin. It was impossible to believe him dead, knowing how angry he was. When Gyp came running up the stairs and fell upon me with his fists I thought at first that it really was Paris. I was too amazed to defend myself. Gyp punched me as he liked, knocking me off the piano stool, cutting my lip on his knuckles, leaving me dazed and half senseless on the floor, weeping for disappointment. It is odd. I had loved my father with all the perverse, unreasoning heart of a child, and his death was quite unacceptable to me; quite beyond the limit of my imagination. It left me, I remember, unbelievably lonely.

Gyp could not have known about the Polonaise. I suppose it seemed merely blasphemous to him; it must

have sounded like a death march and song of victory rolled into one. Gyp has always been in some ways a conventional person, he never understood Paris in the least.

When I told Penelope to come up in half an hour I meant to use the time in acquainting myself with the room and the furniture, finding by touch where everything was placed, but when she came up I had still not moved from the door. When she came in she stumbled, and I asked her what it was.

"Your suitcases," she said. "They've left them here by the door."

We had arrived by the afternoon train. I had forgotten that by now it was quite dark, and there was no light in the room.

Already I can see how I shall spend my days here. It is an agreeable, loose schedule, easily interrupted, easily discarded altogether. In the morning I go through the newspapers with Penelope in the library, and deal with correspondence, which I type myself or dictate to her. In the afternoon a walk; and in the evening the family generally joins the guests in one of the drawing-rooms. There are seven guests now; Gyp has reduced the rates to an out-of-season minimum and advertised widely, and it has been quite successful. The guests are rather dull but pleasant enough people, shy with me still. Since this time-table by no means occupies all my day, when I feel inclined or—which is more usual—bored, I come up here to the tower room and work.

Ironically enough, I find myself in exactly the same position as Paris.

I am supposed to be writing my autobiography, or at least making notes for my autobiography, but, in fact, I

am doing nothing of the kind. I am writing this journal entirely for my own amusement to alleviate the boredom which ultimately is the principal burden imposed by blindness.

The idea, like all ideas, was Gyp's. It began with a young man who was writing the history of my squadron, shortly after the war. He got the address of Gyp's flat from St Dunstan's and called on me. He called, in fact, a number of times, and I gave him whatever details he wanted and a number of photographs. His book was published some time afterwards and was, I believe, very successful, though I never read it.

He had told Gyp on several occasions that he would like to write my biography. Gyp was enthusiastic, and in the end I agreed. But when the young man read out the first draft of a chapter I found so much of the young man's opinions and so few of my own that I declined to continue with the collaboration. It was then that Gyp suggested I wrote it myself.

It bored me intensely. I have no memory for dates and names, and dislike being put to the extreme fatigue of going through old diaries and letters and official records. When I was with Gyp there was a young woman, a student, who used to come and do these things for me, but I did not greatly care to have her browse through my diaries and letters. So the autobiography became a journal of no consequence whatsoever, and continues to please Gyp and the others.

Like Paris, I am at work when anyone comes up to the tower room. There are the completed pages to prove it. And since they are embossed with braille and no one else can read them, it does not greatly matter what I write.

It would be quicker to type, but this has the twin

disadvantage that anyone who comes into the room can read what I have written, and that I myself cannot. Also, I am very bad at braille shorthand, and it is an excellent thing for me to practise it. My braille writer is a great improvement on the older models, and comparatively silent. It has six keys like typewriter keys, set on a metal bar, and they move, after each symbol, from right to left. The bar is moved down a backing board after each line, and the symbols make indentations, so that when the paper is turned over it can be read in the normal way.

Paris, who could be utterly independent, was in the end slave to himself, to the comic masquerade which that same independence forced upon him. So it is with me. I would not bother with this journal at all, save for the fact that if I gave it up Gyp would harass me until he found something else for me to do.

People do talk to me.

This afternoon, which is Sunday, I was waiting in my room for Penelope and the usual walk, but, instead of Penny, Gyp came up. Though he has spent the greater part of his life in the city, he has that placid step—neither idle nor urgent, only deliberate—which country folk have had since Adam, who look to the sun for the time of day and so do not concern themselves overmuch with divisions of the hour. He is placid and serene. I am sure the others see no change in him. I am sure there can be nothing in his face to give him away. It is because of his letters, and perhaps because of something in his voice and the slow manner of his moving—a certain listlessness—that I know. He is placid and serene, but it is the placid serenity of extreme illness. Where there is no hope there is often no concern.

So much has this girl accomplished in him. It is not to be expected that she should understand this. If she were told plainly, still I do not think she would understand. I think Gyp has quoted to me every remark that she ever made to him. No doubt they were made with a thousand little charming tricks and gestures and inflections of her beautiful voice. Nevertheless, none of them betrays an unusual degree of wit or intelligence. Some of them are remarkably stupid. But if there is not the subtlety of a disguised second meaning Gyp has invented one; and if he is unable to invent one, he attributes it to his own dullness. He can discover no flaw in her. From prejudice and not from observation he insisted on her perfection, and so lost her.

Despite his air of immense stability which makes him so admirable in business and so exasperating everywhere else; despite the outward preoccupation with material traditions which led him into the unbelievable folly of re-establishing the house, and all his ponderous schemes for it which Cromwell very properly snubbed, there is much of the poet in Gyp, just as there was in Paris. Both share, to my mind, some degree of that immaturity so evident in the works of all poets and artists of merit—a direct vision, an immediate response that a child has when the trained indifference of the adult mind is not yet superimposed upon it. A sensibility, it may be, which rejects the greater part of civilised society as a digression. Oscar Wilde's epigrams are scintillatingly witty, but almost invariably untrue.

It is this quality of immaturity in Gyp which makes him at once inviolable and terribly vulnerable; which transforms a commonplace love affair into a profound tragedy. It was this quality in Paris which ultimately drove him to his death. For this reason alone, I doubt

that Gyp is Cromwell's son. The girl told him so, and it is possible, but the validity of the excuse is less important than the use to which she puts it. Gyp tells me that she has gone away, he does not know where.

That he is sincerely and profoundly in love with her there can be no doubt. Whether she ever loved him—as he insists she did—is less certain. The strongest argument in favour of his claim is that he believes it. If it is true, then she has shown more sense than I credited her with in going away. For, of course, they are hopelessly unsuited, related or not.

But it is an interesting theory. I would ask Elizabeth, except that I don't for a moment believe that she would tell the truth.

Hearing Gyp on the stairs when I was waiting for Penelope, and answering his knock, and turning in my chair to face the sound of him, I was reminded straightway of this Lucia affair, and my thoughts dwelt on it; but Gyp, when he spoke, talked quite cheerfully about Barbara, and Kay, and the guests, and never mentioned Lucia at all.

I must guard against this flying to essentials.

A sighted person approached by a smiling friend instinctively smiles in return and joins his mood. Similarly a woebegone face inspires an approach of tact and sympathy. But unless people when I encounter them are actually laughing, or crying, or swearing—or otherwise audibly proclaiming themselves—they inspire nothing at all in me. Therefore I am apt to picture intimates in terms of their most profound and individual preoccupations, forgetting that these produce those emotions which they are least likely to be displaying. So I imagine Gyp walking about all day with an

expression of exaggerated misery worthy of the silent films, which is really very funny.

Kay is unhappy at her school, Gyp told me; she has written a long and confused letter to Barbara begging to be allowed to leave now. They had been discussing the advisability of bringing her down right away; considering arrangements with the school at Croxton, the lack of companions of her own age at Sagastrand.

"What do you think?" Gyp asked me.

A nice question between bachelors.

I said: "Don't you think it's up to Barbara?"

Gyp hesitated. An intake of breath to say something, then a pause.

I asked him whether Penelope was coming up, and when he said No, I suggested that we went for a walk together, since he obviously wanted to talk to me. He helped me into my coat and fetched my stick. He left me in the hall while he went to get his own coat, and I went out with the intention of waiting under the porch, and collided violently with one of the main doors. The noise brought footsteps running from the direction of the kitchen and an exclamation in round German.

"Hille," I said. "You see this door?" I felt for the edge, caught hold of it and slammed the door to. I was so angry I slammed it harder than I had meant to, and for a moment I thought the glass had gone. Hille made a small noise of alarm. "This door must be kept closed," I told her, "or"—I found the handle and opened the door to its fullest extent—"wide open. I don't care which. The same applies to all the other doors in this godforsaken house. I'm not going to risk breaking my flaming neck because some half-witted idiot leaves them halfway. Tell the servants the next person to leave a door

half open can pack their things and clear out! Tell Gill!"

"To tell Gill," Hille said, and sneezed, because there was now a bitter wind down the hall.

No doubt she told Gill something, probably that I am dangerous and to be avoided. I don't think she had the least idea of what I was saying. However, I was stinging from the blow against the door, with a nice bruise coming up, and I felt much better for having sworn at somebody. By the time Gyp came back I was outside and enjoying the cold wind. The leaves had been apparently swept clear down the carriage-way, and with my stick and Gyp's voice to guide me I had no difficulty in finding my way.

"Barbara," Gyp said, "doesn't seem able to make up her mind. She wants the child down here, of course, but she's in such a poor state of nerves, Jon. That's half her trouble, she can't bring herself to make decisions."

This sounded plausible, but I doubted its truth. If Barbara was reluctant to bring Kay to Sagastrand, she had a reason of her own. My guess was that it had something to do with her ex-husband.

"Hugh is in London still, isn't he?" I said. "Does he visit Kay at her school?"

"Hugh?" Gyp said. "I don't know, perhaps he does. Barbara has custody. I don't know what arrangements they made. What has that got to do with it?"

"It might make her reluctant to bring Kay away."

Gyp did not follow this, evidently. "Surely it's bad for the child. I should have thought it would make Barbara all the more keen to fetch her away."

"But it might upset Hugh," I pointed out.

"You think Barbara would care about that?"

"I think," I told him, "that Barbara would die a

thousand deaths rather than give Hugh a moment's inconvenience."

"But they are divorced!"

"Yes."

"They had the most bitter quarrels——"

"So I believe."

Everyone even remotely acquainted with them knew how bitter their quarrels had been. Hugh, at least, had foraged wide in his search for sympathy.

"They can't stand the sight of each other," Gyp said.

"Who told you?"

"Barbara herself——"

The sound of his footsteps ceased altogether. I waited for him to catch me up. Even for Gyp, it was taking him a remarkably long time to catch my meaning—probably because he dislikes Hugh so much. He has no very good reason for disliking Hugh. It is merely that Barbara is his sister and their marriage failed, and therefore Hugh must have treated her abominably. But a divorce is quite final, an irrevocable breach made, in this case, by mutual consent no matter what the law might say. It had evidently never occurred to Gyp that such a divorce might be less than entirely satisfactory to both parties.

Gyp caught me up again with a rush, but though I knew he was considering my views, he made only one further remark on the subject. He said: "You know, Jon, I think you are wrong."

But I know I am right.

We crossed the road at the end of the carriage-way and took a footpath somewhere up in the direction of the downs. The grasses alongside the path, brushing my legs and my stick, were heavy with recent rain. Because the ground was uneven there I took Gyp's arm, which is

a much better guide than letting him take mine, since it puts him slightly in front and warns me when he turns or pauses. "There's a puddle here," he said, and he stepped across it first. I judged it correctly by thrusting my stick down on the opposite side.

We climbed to the top of a hill, where the wind was so fierce that Gyp had to shout to describe the view. The wind was not in gusts but blowing steadily in one direction so that it seemed to drive from afar off, and this gave me the impression of open space and great distances. I knew from the grasses and the air itself that the day must be dull, and the clouds must be low and grey and fast-moving. These hills run down to the sea, Gyp told me, the masts like pencils bobbing in the harbour; there were the glistening slate roofs in the village, a little smoke off sideways from the chimneys; Sagastrand from here obscured by the trees and marked only by the single tower thrust up above them. It was very easy to imagine—particularly easy because there was so little colour in the scene. Everything in tiffy mental images appears against a background of colours, ill-defined, roscate often or faintly rainbow-hued, blending, merging and cheerful, which many years ago replaced the first Stygian-black darkness. These are the imagined colours, which are not really colours at all, which a sighted person may experience to some degree by pressing hard upon the eyes. I can remember doing this myself once upon a time. But I find it difficult to attribute colours to particular objects, or to imagine them distinctly.

We stayed up on the downs and talked of the hotel until the rain came again and drove us back to the house.

One of the guests has a birthday in a few days' time

and is anxious to entertain us all. A dance was suggested—there are some quite young people here now—and agreed to, and now Gyp was considering the problem of the music. Hiring a professional band would be expensive, a gramophone inadequate. I made the obvious suggestion that the piano in my room be moved downstairs.

“Who would play it?” Gyp asked.

I said that I would.

This surprised him a great deal. I have not opened the piano since I came, and everyone supposes that there is some complicated artistic reason for this and that I am sensitive and highly strung. The truth is, however, that I cannot be bothered. I no longer play well, and to play badly merely puts me out of temper and gives me no pleasure at all. But I have no objection to providing them with popular music which any fool with the proper number of fingers and thumbs can manage. It might be quite enjoyable to shake some of the cobwebs out of the rafters. And from the family, perhaps.

November, and the days are still warm and clear. Penelope brought some pine cones into the house for the fires and put one into my hand and said: “Know what this is?”

Better than she realised. Penelope was not yet born when we used to go out with baskets at this time of the year for the cones. I told her what it was in my hand, and I told her where she had found it, and I told her of another place where she had not yet looked and would be likely to find any number of them. She was amazed. She went out again and it was true, there were more than she could carry back.

I like it here, I am growing to like it. I am able to

find my way about the house now without Penelope and without troubling anybody, which means that people annoy me a great deal less than usual. Gyp's fence takes me along the cliffs, and the other way, up in the direction of the hills, there is a rookery somewhere high up in the trees. The rooks generally make such a din caw-cawing that it is impossible to miss the way.

Gyp has been so determined from the start that everyone shall be happy in this house, and at least two of us are—Liza and myself. Liza is genuinely fond of Sagastrand without having Gyp's exaggerated pride in the place—a house, after all, and an unusually inconvenient one—and she enjoys supervising the kitchen staff and organising the catering and supplies. She takes a tremendous amount of trouble with the guests and they appreciate it, and they tell her they appreciate it, and no one has ever told her that before. But the truth is, we share, Liza and I, the peculiar secret of contentment commonly associated with the Miller of Dee. Being at heart deeply involved in no one's life but our own.

I am able to find my way about the house very well, and this was demonstrated in an amusing manner last night. I was playing bridge with Elizabeth against Commander and Mrs Cox in the main drawing-room, and most of the others I think were there, reading or talking round the fire. We played with my own braille cards, which have ordinary standard markings as well as braille symbols, and each person, as they played, called out the card they put down. The Coxes think I am astonishingly clever because we generally beat them, but the truth is that they themselves play an indifferent game, and the system of calling out the cards, which

Liza and I are used to, still distracts them. I think they spend most of their time watching me.

I was trying to finesse through dummy, Mrs Cox put down a card and then there was complete silence. A gasp and a sudden laugh from another part of the room should have told me that something was wrong, but I was concentrating on my finesse. I waited to know what card had been played. No one spoke. Rather irritable, I expect, I asked for the card, and then Elizabeth said: "The lights have gone out."

Everyone seemed to move at once, and a table went over. It was late, and must have been a particularly dark night, for I heard someone draw the curtains and it didn't seem to make any difference. Several facetious remarks were passed back and forth among the younger guests, and then Penelope called from the window that the lights were out in the village also. I heard Gyp's voice next.

"It happens sometimes. I expect they'll come on again presently. There's a bell by the fireplace. Ring for the servants, they'll bring candles."

"They will be in bed," Elizabeth said.

"Where are the candles?" Penelope wanted to know. "In the storeroom? I'll go."

One of the guests, Franklin, a very young Air Force officer on leave who was showing a rather obvious interest in Penelope, became gallant and said that he would go.

I said: "Shall I?"

This was received in a silence tense with protest. Barbara was the first to see the joke. She usually is. I heard her chuckle at the bureau, where she had been writing letters. There is something very mischievous in her laugh, and it is particularly obvious when, as it so often

happens, she laughs at a time when everyone else is being serious. Incongruity amuses her before direct humour, and this was incongruous enough, that I moved freely about in a room where everyone else stumbled and pawed their way. So Barbara laughed, and then I laughed, and then everyone else. I found the candles without any difficulty, I even stuck them in a candlestick and lit them before carrying them back to the others.

It did not occur to me until much later that I had not heard Penelope laugh at all. Probably it would never have occurred to me if Penelope had not made a bitter reference to the incident. When she brought the newspapers into the library the following morning I told her that Franklin was looking for her, and she said that he could go on looking for all she cared.

"Don't you like him?" I asked.

She said contemptuously: "Did you hear him laughing last night? He sounded exactly like a horse—jackasses, all of them!" And after a moment she said: "It was Barbara, of course. She takes a vicious delight in that sort of thing."

She was turning the pages of the newspaper at a great rate and ripped a page.

I suppose it must have been obvious to everyone in the house except me that there was some sort of quarrel between my sisters. And now, considering Penelope's remark and how extraordinarily unjust it was, it did strike me that they exchanged very few words when they were together. When it became apparent that Penelope was not going to read anything and was probably not even looking at the paper, I said: "What's the matter? Have you two quarrelled?"

"No," Penelope said in a choked voice. "I hate her, that's all."

I supposed that they had quarrelled after all.

"You'll get over it," I promised her. "I know how you feel. But it isn't Barbara, Penny, it's you. Hating and loving aren't very rational processes, you know, they are only different ways of expressing something that we find in ourselves."

She jumped up and answered me with a tight fury of impatience: "Oh, *damn* your highbrow philosophy! Keep it for Gyp—or someone else who's got porridge in their veins instead of blood! Tell me when I'm a hundred years old and don't *care* any more! I have good reason to hate her!"

Recording that tirade now, I can see that there is much subject for argument. The logic supporting my thesis is quite sound, and I ought to have pursued it in a rational way, drawing her on and perhaps calming her. But at the time I seized upon the exasperated reference to Gyp which was so much in reverse of the truth—had she but known it!—that I burst out laughing, and Penelope stamped out of the room.

She came with me on my afternoon walk, however, and made some sort of apology for her temper. We went down the cliff path on to the sands. The descent is not an easy one for me, and we were too much occupied with managing it for conversation. But along the sands, close by the sound of the breakers, I asked her what her reason was, that made her hate Barbara so much. She would not tell me at first. She made excuses and I rejected them one after another; and then eventually she checked me with a hand on my arm and said: "Do you know where we are?"

I reflected upon this reluctantly, suspecting another

red herring, for it is an old game between us. I listened for a moment, but the sea sounds the same all along. I made a guess: "The big rock, the one shaped like a lion's head."

"We passed that long ago."

"Somewhere about the caves, then."

Her voice came back to me strained with an attempt at flippancy. "The lowest," she said. "I call it Barbara's cave. Or Shaun's. It was here that she seduced him."

I said: "Very funny."

"Yes, isn't it?"

I did not believe it; but I understood then that Penelope believed it.

"One Sunday," she said, "when I was in church. In church—that's funnier still!—praying for him. God bless my darling Shaun."

I felt for her arm and found it, and caught it hard. "Stop it, Penny. Don't be a fool. You know it isn't true."

"Oh, Jon! Jon!"

She threw herself against me, so violently that I almost lost my balance, and cried her heart out, hiding her face against me with the perverse modesty or vanity which women show at such times. I comforted her as best I could, chiefly by stroking her hair and saying nothing and waiting for the storm to blow itself out. I felt awkward and at a disadvantage, and—to be honest—rather irritated. As a family we are not much given to embraces. I had not held Penelope in my arms since she was a child. I didn't know what to do with her. But presently she was calmer and stood away from me. I think she dabbed her eyes with a handkerchief.

Her voice was unsteady: "Let's go on. I'll tell you if you like. I'm better now."

I thought it best to let her talk since she had already said so much. I thought I should be able to point out flaws in her account and to demolish the whole story as absurd. And also, being human, I was curious.

"I came back from church that morning," Penelope said, "and Shaun was out. I didn't think he was out at first because his car was there, and Shaun never walked anywhere if he could help it. Besides that, it was pouring with rain; so I thought that was odd. I went and asked Gill, because Gill was the first person I could find. He said he thought Shaun had gone out with *me*, he said he had seen us going down towards the cliffs. Gill was so sure it was me he'd seen that I thought he must have meant the previous day; Shaun and I *had* been down there. Gill is never too bright at the best of times. I left it at that; I was curious, but I didn't think anything. And then Shaun came in . . . alone . . . and soaked through; and I told him, and he said Gill was mad and he—said—he'd gone out by himself . . . because he had a headache.

"I believed him. I didn't think any more of it. Not till later. Not until the afternoon when I was going to the kitchen to speak to Hille, and I went past the rack where the coats hang and a coat brushed against me all wet—— And it was my black mackintosh, my old one. I do wear it sometimes, just out for a walk or in the garden when it doesn't matter. And then I knew. All at once I knew, and I went up to Barbara's room. I was going to ask her, but she wasn't there. And I went and looked in her cupboards—yes, I did—and her walking shoes were there, all wet and the sand still on them.

"I was mad, absolutely mad. Instead of asking Shaun outright or tackling Barbara I said nothing—nothing! I pretended to Shaun that I didn't know anything. I

hoped . . . I was hoping all the time that he would tell me, and I should know that there was nothing to it. And then one morning Shaun was gone, and there was a note saying . . . saying his leave was up, and he would write."

After a moment, when she said nothing more, I put a question:

"Have you spoken to Barbara?"

"What's the use? She would only lie to me."

I thought this very likely, but I did not say so. I thought her conclusion, on these facts, was outrageous. I was inclined to laugh at her. I said: "Why, Penny, there's nothing in that. What on earth makes you think——"

She interrupted dully. "I didn't ask Barbara. I asked Shaun. I know—I told you I missed him in London. But I didn't, I saw him. At his club. I knew he would have to go back there because his kit was there, he'd told me. I made a scene. Women aren't allowed in his club, but I made a scene and he had to see me. He didn't want to.

"I played a dirty trick on Shaun. I told him I'd had it out with Barbara and that she'd told me exactly what had happened. I made it sound as bad as I could. I meant to force him into denying it, but he didn't; he admitted it. He said Barbara had tricked him, she'd tricked us both. She never cared for him. She just wanted to hurt him, that's all."

Penelope took my arm again and we turned back. The more unreasonable her conclusions sounded, the more I became persuaded of their truth. But I still affected some degree of scepticism. I said: "Why? Why should she want to hurt Shaun?"

"She hated him, I suppose."

I said again patiently: "Why?"

Penelope said: "You never saw Shaun, did you?"—and laughed abruptly at her mistake. "I mean you never *met* him. To look at, he's very like Hugh Connor."

"And is that a reason?" I asked.

"Reason enough for Barbara. She's all—twisted inside, Jon. Yes—that's what you said, didn't you? You hate people because of something inside yourself."

I did not care to hear my own words turned so neatly and flung back at me out of their context. I argued with her, but she would not talk about it any more. Nothing I could say would change her conviction. She made me promise that I would say nothing to anyone, which is a pity, because I should have liked to ask Barbara privately. Not *if* the story happened as Penelope says. *Why*.

Of course, Penelope is wrong in her conclusions.
Half wrong.

So now I sit at table with them all and listen to their conversation about the coming dance, and about the hotel and the guests and the weather; and hear my mother tease Penelope a little about Franklin, who is becoming a nuisance; Gyp and Barbara discuss the wording of the advertisements for the hotel, which they insert regularly now in local and London papers, and Elizabeth says that Gill is very keen on starting a vegetable garden to supply the hotel; someone complains that telephone calls are not properly recorded, and the guests are not paying their share in consequence; Barbara asks me how my famous autobiography is getting on, and Elizabeth says will the little boxroom do for Kay when she comes?

There is so much loving and so much hating here!

Knowing each of them so well and lacking the necessary deception of their faces, I marvel at the duplicity of human nature—and at its resilience.

Kay arrived this morning. She is tremendously excited at coming down here. She has never been in a house as big as Sagastrand before, and spends her time exploring. She goes up the main staircase and down the backstairs and from room to room round the corridors, often losing herself entirely. Barbara scolded her because she went into the guests' rooms, but the guests don't mind. Kay is seven or eight, I think, tall for her age and remarkably lacking in shyness. Gill is alarmed at her run of difficult questions—he does not know whether he is supposed to take her seriously—but Hille and the maids have taken to her immediately. For my part, I am very fond of Kay. She is an agreeable child, but she is apt to be exuberant, and I like her in small doses, a little at a time. She gets on so well with people—as Barbara does—that it is difficult to believe that she was really unhappy at boarding school, and I think this was merely an excuse to get her own way; though no doubt she did miss Barbara, whom she obviously worships.

Kay will do well here. Being at school and away from Barbara has already improved her a great deal. She is more independent. Barbara is so anxious that Kay shall repeat none of her own mistakes in her life that she has guarded the child too closely, watched her too constantly, been too strict, loved her too much. But these things fell away when Kay was at school, and they will fall away again here too, among strangers. I prefer Kay when she is alone with me, when she puts those curious, thoughtful questions which she knows Barbara would

check. What's it like when you're asleep, Uncle Jon, and you dream? How do you know when it's morning? All those little scars—do they hurt you? And her favourite, and most unanswerable: What is it like to be blind?

I tell her this and that. Is it like closing your eyes? No, it isn't like that. Think of something, think of your big toe, Kay. Now try to imagine *seeing* with your big toe. Yes, perhaps it's something like that. And she wriggles her toe inside her shoe and is thoughtful.

"Do you know what *I* look like, Uncle Jon?"

"Come here, Kay."

She comes and stands here, and I touch her hair and move the tips of my fingers over the smooth forehead, touch the little nose, the full, small mouth, the firm chin—in a moment.

"Now I know what you look like."

And then laughing, jumping about: "Do you? Do you really?"

Perhaps not.

"Am *I* pretty?"

Yes, I am sure she is pretty. She will learn for herself soon enough, there is no need for me to tell her.

When Barbara is there Kay asks me whether there will be snow here in the winter, and I tell her about the tobogganing on the downs; and she asks if she can fetch anything, and if she may light a match for my cigarette. But she does not ask these other questions.

Her proper name is Kathleen, but this was shortened to the initial when she was a baby. Barbara calls her Kathleen only when she is particularly displeased with her.

The dance was held in the main drawing-room, which is the largest room in the house. The carpets were rolled

back from the centre of the floor, leaving ample space for chairs along the walls, and two buffet tables at one end. The french windows form three alcoves along the garden side, and each of these is raised a step above the level of the floor. The piano was brought down from the tower room with incredible difficulty and placed in the first alcove. I chose the first because it was nearest to the fire, and it was cold in there—it invariably is cold in that room. Gyp brought the piano-stool down, and I sat down and tried it for height. I told Gyp that it would do very well there. He waited a little. Then he said hesitantly: "Would you like to play something? There's no one here." And then he said, as if to excuse the suggestion: "I didn't know that you played—well, dance music, Jon." I laughed at that, and he added: "I've never heard you."

"I played any amount of it," I told him. "In the Raf."

"That was a long time ago, wasn't it?"

"Are you afraid I'll be all thumbs?"

"I don't know," he said honestly, "what I'm afraid of." He began to walk away—a few steps on to the uncarpeted floor—and then turned back. "Are you sure this is a good idea?"

I told him, Oh, to play the bloody thing himself.

Of course, he doesn't play at all. My retort must have seemed to him quite unprovoked, but he apologised straight away merely for having upset me. But it is this cloying solicitude which annoys me most. I prefer Barbara's attitude, which is that I am a nuisance; or Kay, who looks upon me as a curiosity. But I am sick of Gyp, who gives me all the consideration awarded a backward and difficult child. However, he means well, it is not his fault. I apologised myself, very handsomely, and

clapped him on the back and told him that he was a good fellow, which he is. He went off quite pleased.

There was quite a crowd at the dance. Most of the guests brought friends along, and as the majority of them were young, the more sedate and valued guests like the Coxes were pushed further and further into the background. Everyone drank too much, I drank too much myself; and in the end it developed into quite a different kind of evening from what Gyp at least had intended.

It began quietly enough. I gave them a slow waltz, a simple thing and rather silly, but with a good rhythm to it which got them out on to the floor. They all applauded at the end for an excessively long time as if I had done something clever. Naturally, any pianist can play without looking at the keyboard. I heard Barbara's voice and called her over.

"What the hell are they clapping at?"

She said laconically: "You."

I followed the waltz with a tango so fast that they were all falling over themselves; and the older people, I was told afterwards, gave it up and withdrew, offended and puzzled. But the young ones liked it and were laughing noisily, and called for more. I gave them another one, and then Barbara came back and whispered harshly: "You're making an exhibition of yourself. I know you don't care. But have a thought for other people. Gyp's having to make apologies for you."

"Sorry, Babs."

Genuinely, I was sorry. I was in that pleasantly mellow mood of knowing that I was enjoying myself, and I had no wish to upset anybody. Probably because of what I had drunk and my mood as much as anything else I went straight into a pretty, rather sentimental melody

called, I believe, *Loving and Giving*. It was very popular a year or so ago; you used to hear it everywhere, but you don't hear it very often now. It is very easy to dance to. I have danced to it myself. I had some sort of idea that Barbara used to like it—I know I associated it with her, but it was not until I was well into the theme and it was too late to stop that I remembered why.

It was Hugh's song. He used to rave about it—Hugh, not Barbara. They must have danced to it together dozens of times.

I said aloud: "Barbara," but either she did not answer or she had gone. I hurried through *Loving and Giving* and made an end to it as soon as I could. Then I turned and waited, and after a moment Penelope came up.

"That was lovely, Jon," she said. "Why don't you always play; you play like an angel."

"Where is Barbara?" I asked her.

After a moment Penelope said: "I don't see her. I think she must have gone out for a minute. Play something else like that. Or *fast*. What about another tango?"

I asked her if she was enjoying herself. She sounded surprised.

"I wish you could see us! Jerry Franklin's brought a whole mob of his friends—all mad as hatters. Yes, we're having a lovely time!"

Then someone—one of the officers, no doubt—pulled her away with scarcely an apology. I heard her laughing, and then people began to crowd about me with requests for this tune and that. I played whatever they asked for. I think Barbara came back later, but I had no chance of speaking to her again. She did not come across to me, and presently I forgot her.

During an interval the Air Force officers came over

in a group. I heard Franklin's stage whisper. Wing-Commander type. Loaded with gongs. He told them that I had shot down three hundred and twenty-seven German planes in the Battle of Britain and had got the V.C., and that after I was blinded I went back to night-flying with braille instruments. No one appeared to question any of these statements, so I suppose they were all as drunk as Franklin. They were very respectful and well behaved, however, in spite of Penelope's opinion of them. They were introduced—a succession of hands, each as hot and moist as the last. Franklin said: "I say, sir—you play damned well, you know," which annoyed me again; but he put a tankard very carefully into my hand, and they insisted on drinking my health and singing *For he's a jolly good fellow*. Since there was no other music I played it for them. I had a momentary vision in my mind of Barbara standing at the other end of the room chanting cynically: And so say all of us. A girl slid warm, bare arms over my neck and said briefly: "Lo, Beautiful," and kissed me. I kissed her back heartily. She seemed very nice. I have no idea who she was.

My recollections of the remainder of the evening are indistinct. Elizabeth said good-night, then Commander Cox, several other guests, then a number of people, but it was much later that I played the last waltz. There seemed to be a great number of people still in the room, and in the hall when I passed through it. I walked a little way out round the house. The cold night air made me feel suddenly ill, and I was sick. I stayed out there until my head cleared, but without noticing how long, and when at last I returned to the house I met no one. The dining-room was absolutely silent and very hot. I went and opened a window, went to the piano and lit

myself a cigarette. I went back and closed the door, and then, coming to the piano again, I thought suddenly of Paris and was ashamed. I don't know why—it was nothing to do with the dance; Paris would have enjoyed the dance thoroughly, the young officers, the laughing and the singing. Or perhaps it was the dance and because he would have enjoyed it so that I thought of my father. Yet in a sense too, I found these things inadequate, as if there was something important that I had neglected. I remembered Barbara's *Loving and Giving* and was sorry, but it wasn't that either.

I felt perfectly clear-headed, and not at all tired. It is always the way. I put my fingers down my throat in the fashion of olden times and am rid of the wine's soporific effects at once, before it poisons my system—a disgusting trick, but useful.

I opened the front of my braille wrist-watch and the hands stood at ten to eleven, so it had stopped. It occurred to me that it must be morning. The window I had opened must be already full of the daybreak. Once in rebellion I had played Chopin in memory of my father. Now, with the open window fresh behind me, I played his *Morgenlied*.

It is the finest thing he ever composed. He wrote it when he was very young, and it is free of the extravagances that mar his more mature work, a lovely thing. It begins very quietly as the dawn does, the first whispers of light stirring, a breath of wind, a bird awaking, the hills appearing in outline against the sunrise. Then quite soon—for it was written at Sagastrand—the restless sea and the gulls' harsh cries across it, a wind it may be, springing up and catching the spray. I know it all so well. As the theme progresses, it is the sea that comes forward and dominates the rest. It is brilliantly

conceived. In essence it is not so much the gradual on-coming of the day as our awakening to it; the sea, with its unending movement, is present from the first notes, but we are not aware of it; only gradually does it become apparent, first as background music, then dominating the theme, then as the theme itself.

At this point the music is very loud, and I heard the door click as it closed. I went on playing. No one spoke. Whoever it was came barefoot, and only when they crossed the bare dance-floor did I recognise the steps.

"Kay?"

"Yes, Uncle Jon. It's me."

She was quite close now. She was afraid that I would send her away. Quickly, afraid of interrupting me, she said that she had come downstairs for a glass of water. She had been thirsty. She had heard the piano.

"Is it very loud?" I asked her.

"No, not outside it isn't. It sounds like the sea."

"It is, Kay. Listen . . ."

I should have sent her back to bed. But I didn't. She settled down on the floor by my stool somewhere. She was so quiet that for a moment I forgot she was there. The music quietens again, as if the wind drops; there comes a part where the birds call one to another. I turned my head with a question:

"Kay—— Tell me. Is it light outside?"

"Yes, Uncle Jon. Quite light."

Barbara knew that Kay had been down with me and she was annoyed, though she said nothing to me, and whatever she said to Kay was not repeated. I tried to apologise to Barbara for playing Hugh's song at the dance, but she said merely:

"I don't remember. What song was that?"

She was lying, but there was nothing more I could say. I have discovered that she does not like Kay to be with me too much. Kay has a good ear for music and I asked her if she would like to learn the piano, and she was very excited and begged me to teach her. But Barbara refused absolutely. She said that Kay had been backward at school, which is true, and that it would interfere with her studies, which is not true. Barbara is coaching Kay herself. She does it extremely well, and I have no wish to interfere.

The dance was so popular that we have decided to hold a dance regularly once a month, and, if this is successful, once a week, perhaps, later on. Gyp suggested this, and at the same time opposed it. The idea of bringing the public in is distasteful to him, and so is the idea of making the hotel licensed, which will be necessary, but he agrees that it will be a sound advertisement. I am told that this was originally Shaun's idea, and no doubt that is another reason why Gyp dislikes it. He has applied for a licence and hopes, I think, that it will be refused.

Winter has come upon us almost, it seems, overnight. The temperature fell abruptly to a sharp frost; and one morning the grass was stiff with rime to the tread and the rain pools crunched when you walked on them. Kay is praying for snow and has already made Gill promise that he will make a toboggan for her. The piano is back in my room, and I have played it two or three times since the dance, not much. I have attempted one or two more difficult pieces, but I have no patience; I have forgotten too much. Gyp bought me some braille scores, but I do not care for them; it is not possible to

read them and play at the same time, and it is a slow business playing a bar at a time.

One of the officers who came that night with Franklin calls regularly to see Penel'ope, and they generally go off somewhere together. She assures me that she will go on loving Shaun until she dies and that she will never marry, but I think she has half-forgotten Shaun already and clings to the principle rather than the man: a conception of herself as betrayed in the grand manner which she is beginning to find attractive. Franklin himself has gone. The hotel has more guests than at any time previously, however, and we are becoming known through Gyp's advertisements. There have already been a number of reservations for December. Why anyone should choose to spend Christmas at Cravenmere is beyond my imagination, but apparently they do.

Gyp is working hard and he seems contented enough, very much his usual self. It is more than two weeks since he mentioned Lucia Cromwell.

Kay is to go to school in Croxton in the new year, it is all arranged. She will board there and come home at week-ends.

December, and there has been no snow, so Kay is disappointed. I have spent much of my time at the piano with Gyp's scores after all, and have neglected this journal in consequence. Playing at these dances has made me interested again. I let Gyp think it is his scores because it pleases him so much, but it is the dances. I learned some new tunes—one or two of the new melodies which are not directly taken from the classics are quite charming, and I have been amusing myself by setting my own arrangements to them. Everyone except

Barbara is very pleased with me, and hints at my *recovery* as if I had had a sort of musical illness. But it is just as much a fraud as the journal has been. I am like an artist who goes on mixing his paints and never touches the canvas. Why all this fuss about my playing? I told Gyp the truth long ago. But people—even honest Gyp—will accept anything before the truth when it collides with their prejudices. When I went back to France after the war my old tutor was extraordinarily patient with me. No one likes to admit absolute failure, and the failure was his as much as mine. But in the end he told me that I was not improving, and that I would never improve until I learned to be patient and took a lot more trouble. Which is a long-winded way of saying that I would never improve at all. I have no patience, I never had; the difference is that I never needed it before. It has nothing to do with my blindness. It is simply that I have lost a number of years out of my life and forgotten too much, and that I am required to go back virtually to begin afresh. These circumstances call for qualities which I do not possess, and which I am, moreover, too old to acquire. Ambition is encouraging in its promise of rewards, but it is a disagreeable whip.

The house is more settled now, we have fallen into a regular monotone of living so effortless that it seems as if nothing will ever again interrupt it. With Kay to think about, Barbara is less introspective and more amiable; and Penelope is quite cheerful again. Penelope does for me all those irritating little things—reading, cutting up food, matching socks or a tie to a shirt—which I am unable to do for myself; and she does them unobtrusively and well, better than anyone I have ever had, nurses, servants, friends, anyone. I have come to rely on her more and more. She still treasures Shaun's

memory dearly, but it is by now so idealised that if he walked into the house I think she might have some trouble in recognising him. But though she has in her heart of hearts quite forgiven Shaun, she has not forgiven Barbara. I don't think she ever will. I don't, on the other hand, see why she should.

We have the licence for the hotel now, in time for Christmas; and I have made myself unpopular by insulting a guest to the extent that she—a middle-aged spinster—packed and left immediately.

She was one of those aggravating people who have Theories on every topic under the sun, and advance them, unasked, all day long. There was no problem raised in her hearing to which she did not offer a prompt and final solution. *Offer* is the wrong word, she did not offer anything, she instructed. She lined up her prejudices in battalions under the shameless banner of Experience. "I always find the best way . . ." "Of course, you *can* do it that way, but the best . . ." The *best* way, always the best way is hers. It is an intolerable habit, this making oneself an authority on everything. Being itself unbearably rude it can be met only with silence, and countered only by rudeness.

After nearly a month we clashed on the subject of Penelope's freedom with adults. Women almost always have Theories on bringing up children, but hers were not only manifestly absurd and out-dated, they were freely illustrated with bleak references to her own childhood, which must have been unusually dreary. She directed her remarks chiefly at Barbara, who maintained an enigmatic silence, and apart from the one remark to which this woman took such violent exception, I took no part in the conversation at all. After some fifteen

minutes, this dreadful creature ended her dissertation by saying confidently :

"And that's how children were brought up in *my* day, and that's how *I* was brought up. Say what you like"—nobody had said anything—"it's the best thing for young people. You can't be too strict with a young girl at that age."

Provided always, I added, you had no objection to her growing up into a disagreeable, neurotic old spinster and inflicting her miseries on other people.

She went, I am assured, white and then purple.

"*Well*,——!"

Well, she has gone.

Holly throughout the main rooms now, paper-chains and tinsel, mistletoe in the hall. Christmas is two days off. There are so many voices about the house that I can no longer distinguish residents from casual visitors. Two children have come, a boy and a girl, particularly welcomed for Kay's sake, but she ignores them. We have three young women from the village, temporarily to help, and the family is kept busy from morning to night. I have made the reception office my particular province and generally answer telephone enquiries, and I rather enjoy this. The piano is kept permanently in the same drawing-room, and I play for them nearly every evening.

One cannot but admire Gyp. He carries the hotel like Atlas on his shoulders. No decision is made on anything without his consent, though he never asks to be consulted. He is pestered a hundred times a day with questions, urgent and trifling, and to each he gives a considered answer that is quite final. The staff regard him as a sort of oracle, and so does Liza. Barbara and I more often take his decisions to pieces and criticise them,

and then he is always right in the end just the same. He is everywhere, moving among the guests and chatting, approving Elizabeth's menu lists, checking the accounts with Barbara, mediating in a backstairs dispute, investigating a complaint to its smallest detail. Though he works harder and longer than any of the staff he is always available to anyone who asks to see him. He has a knack of dealing direct with individuals. When there is a crowd, he disappears; one must search the quiet corners for him, for when everyone else's voice becomes higher and noisier, his never does.

Christmas Eve. This morning Gyp drove into Croxton to collect some provisions. When he returned he came straight up to my room, as he frequently does when he has anything of interest to tell me, something he has seen, someone he has met. This time it was the shops, their decorations and displays and the crowded last-minute rush of shopping. There was nothing of significance in it, and after a minute of this I knew that he had come to the tower room for another reason—it might be to escape the family, but there would be a further cause behind this. He asked me if I had a drink up here. I said I had, and he poured himself something, I don't know what, but he very rarely drinks at this hour of the day. I asked no questions, but he said: "It's Christmas. Merry Christmas, Jon."

"Merry Christmas."

He drank a little and, recollecting himself, offered me a drink. I refused. Then he said: "Jon——"

I waited. He made a sound; it might have been a laugh, I'm not sure.

"I saw her," he said. "In Croxton."

"Lucia?"

"Yes."

"Did you speak to her?"

"No."

He had passed her at some distance, he in the station wagon, she walking. He had not gone back. She had been with someone.

"A man?"

"No, a woman."

That was all there was to it.

Nevertheless, it will entirely spoil his Christmas.

I am sorry for Gyp, but it will not spoil mine. There is always *au fond* something slightly ridiculous about other people's love affairs. The only really satisfactory love affairs are our own. Shakespeare's Romeo is saved from appearing an insufferable ass only by the legendary aspect of the tale, which is sufficiently remote from our lives to enable us to identify ourselves with the protagonists. That he appeared an insufferable ass to his intimates is recorded in the play. Now Gyp has been driven to his room with a raging migraine headache, and we are obliged to make the final arrangement for Christmas without him—which is trying. Whether the migraine was brought on by his seeing Lucia I don't know. But it is tiresome of her to come back now.

December the 25th, a day of ironical contrasts; from the point of view of the hotel entirely successful, a splendid day.

I used to find this house overbearing once because of its vastness. Its lofty ceilings and draughty, echoing corridors have the uncomfortable effect of reducing individuals to pigmy size; half the time we moved about in cathedral silences, the sound of our voices went out and did not come back to us. It is easy by present-day

standards to denounce architect and builder, but to do so is to forget that the house was made in other times and for the entertainment of great numbers of people on a grand scale. Now that Sagastrand is a hotel and crowded again, it becomes obvious. There is nothing quite so effective as laughter for exorcising ghosts, and now there is laughter everywhere, quick footsteps that do not linger to be muffled, voices ringing out and answered too swiftly to wait upon the echo, careless if there is none. Though the festival is celebrated largely in pagan fashion the spirit of goodwill is very much in evidence, as though, for a time, people remember themselves and what they might have been. A visitor clapped a hand on my shoulder and said: "I love this place. It is a happy house," and Kay caught the phrase and chanted it to everyone she met: happy house, happy house.

It was Dante, I think, who observed that there is no greater misery than to recall a time of happiness in sorrow, but I am inclined to the view that the reverse—to bear a private sorrow amid universal happiness—is the greater burden. It is easy for Barbara, she is adept at all forms of masquerade, and her sense of humour allows small margin for self-pity; but for Gyp it must be more difficult.

It had been arranged that the family should attend church in the morning, and since it was necessary for someone to remain in the hotel, we divided ourselves into two groups. The first group, for matins, consisted of Elizabeth, Gyp, Penelope and Kay. Barbara particularly wished to take communion for some reason of her own, and, although she would have liked to go with Kay, Kay has not been confirmed; and, in point of fact, Barbara is the only one who can really manage when Gyp isn't here. I avoided the matins service because I always

avoid crowds whenever possible, and the church would be packed. Too many separate noises are confusing to me, I have a sense of losing my direction. I prefer the church when it is almost empty—which it generally is—and best of all when it is completely empty and there is no service at all. So I went to early communion with Barbara, which pleased me and annoyed her considerably.

Gyp drove us to the church and we walked back. Communion is an easy service to follow, we have no hymns here—I can never remember more than a verse of any hymn—and it always seems to me that at communion people are much quieter, less restless altogether, so that there are few distractions. It is astonishing how much noise there is among the congregation during a morning or evening service when they are supposed to be silent. I remember the Cravenmere church as being unusually ugly, but for me now it has a certain charm because of its warm compactness which holds the organ music so well. The organ is very mellow-toned and exactly right, which is not surprising, seeing that it was installed by Paris. The vicar, who met us at the door and shook my hand with great warmth, is a delightful man who conducts his services with a rare sincerity and intelligence. It is not possible to follow him in the Lord's Prayer without considering—for the first time, very likely—what the words mean.

Forgive us *our* trespasses . . . as we forgive . . . them that trespass against *us* . . .

I enjoy hearing the voices around me, rich in dialect, answering him.

We have our own pew below the pulpit. Barbara and I occupied no more than one end of it, close by the aisle. It occurred to me to reflect that by noon the

whole family would have knelt here. I wondered what prayers would be offered up from this pew today, what petitions would be made.

Barbara did not speak, to me until the prayer of consecration was ended, and then she whispered:

"They are waiting for us."

I became aware that she was nervous. Her hand, when she took my arm, was trembling.

I said quietly: "Are you all right?"

"They are waiting."

It was true: when the family pew is occupied it is to there that the vicar gives his indication that he is ready; the congregation waits; by custom, it is a representative of the family who goes first to the altar.

I bowed my head so that no one should see me speak and whispered quickly: "Are you ill, Babs? Pass me my stick then—quickly. Don't worry, I can go up alone."

But she stood up as if she had not heard, her hand still on my arm, still trembling. I was sure she must be faint. We went to the altar rail and knelt together. When, presently, we returned to our seats Barbara seemed steadier. She said nothing, however, until after the service was ended, when we had spoken again with the vicar and wished each other Merry Christmas, and buttoned our coats against the sudden chillness of the air outside. We began to walk along by the harbour wall on the road. Barbara said quite unexpectedly: "Thank you, Jon."

"For——?"

"For offering to go alone."

"You were faint then," I said, "were you?"

"Yes, I was. A little."

I reproached her with a cheerful reference to the party the previous night and she laughed.

"You think it's a hangover? No. Or—in a sense maybe it is! Not what you mean."

She seemed in such excellent spirits at that moment that without thinking, I made a joke:

"Not a brother for Kay?"

I heard her laugh again, her mischievous laugh.

"No, hardly; it's——"

And then a sharp intake of breath that trapped the next word in her throat.

No, hardly a brother for Kay. But it might have been, it could have been. And this occurred to us both at exactly the same moment.

Barbara has been divorced for more than a year. My remark had been entirely without significance. Such a jest, though unthinkable I dare say outside the family, would be perfectly acceptable to Barbara. I had forgotten Shaun. I had forgotten Penelope's story. I found myself in the position of a man who aims a firearm in fun and discovers too late that it is loaded. I might have passed by her amazement or turned the remark another way, but I was too late. Because I concentrate so much, attuning my senses to perceive other people's reactions, I sometimes forget that they can perceive mine. In that silence we both gave ourselves away.

Barbara had stopped, a little behind me. Now she began to walk on. She said evenly: "Has Penelope been talking to you, then?"

"What about?"

Her voice was impatient, dismissing my pretence. "Shaun, of course. Shaun and me."

"What should Penelope say about you and Shaun?"

"It's not true, of course. You didn't believe her, did you?"

"I don't know what she's supposed to have told me yet."

"You're lying, aren't you."

"Yes," I said. "I think we both are."

This upset her for a moment. Then she laughed once more. I thought at first that Penelope must have challenged her after all, made some accusation, but it was not so. Penelope has never mentioned the subject to Barbara. Barbara told me this, and when I questioned her again she said: "I had a letter from Shaun. He mentioned what happened in London. You know Penny saw him?"

"Yes."

"Shaun was rather acid. He was under the impression that I had told Penny. Only an idiot would believe that, but then Shaun is an idiot."

I asked her when she had heard from Shaun and she said ages ago, and that she had had several letters.

"From Kenya?" I said. "So soon?"

"He isn't in Kenya, he's in London. He wants me to marry him."

I was so surprised that I went carelessly for a moment and was nearly run over by a car coming up from the village.

"That's the vicar," Barbara said. "He waved."

I waved back heartily, and she laughed and said that he had gone now. "And are you going to?" I asked, and she said going to what?

"Marry Shaun?"

She said contemptuously: "I wouldn't marry Shaun if he was the last man on earth."

"Did you tell him so?"

"I didn't tell him anything. You don't imagine I answered his letters, do you?"

I remembered that she had called him an idiot.

"If you have such a poor opinion of him, why did you let yourself get involved in the first place?"

"Why?" Barbara said. "Why does anyone do anything?"

Which is no answer at all.

When we reached the house the post had arrived, and there was an enormous parcel for Kay from Hugh. It was a doll nearly as big as herself which will walk and close its eyes and say 'Mama' and perform other less agreeable functions peculiar to small children. Kay is so precocious in some of her ways that I had imagined her too old for dolls, but she adores it. She calls it *Winkie*, no one knows why. There was a note in the parcel wishing her a very happy Christmas and signed *Daddy*, and this Barbara read out to her because Hugh's writing is very bad and Kay could not read it herself. But there was no word for Barbara.

I should have liked to continue my conversation with Barbara, and later in the morning when the rest of the family had gone off to matins I went in search of her. But she had gone through to the kitchen and was immersed in a last-minute panic over the midday dinner. I came up to the tower room and wrote a little of this journal, and then went across to play the piano, and, of course, it was downstairs.

The main drawing-room is supposed to be reserved for residents, but casual visitors who drop in for a drink more often than not find their way there. But this morning everyone seemed to be in the front lounge, where the bar is. The drawing-room was empty. I played a few bars on the piano, and someone came in: a woman's step, and a stranger to me, a new guest or else a visitor.

She spoke in rather a pleasant, slightly husky voice. I judged her to be young, probably not out of her twenties, and from the level of her voice as I heard it, fairly small. She said: "Oh!—aren't I supposed to be in here?" so then I knew she was a visitor, not a guest.

I enjoy meeting strangers, particularly when there is no third person present to tell me who they are and what they look like, and to make apologies for me. I have met people here and carried on quite long conversations with them, and they have gone away and never discovered that I am blind.

"You don't remember me?" this girl said.

I was sure that I did not. I wondered, suddenly, if she was not the girl who had come up behind me at that first dance, with the Air Force officers. I said: "Let me see"—an expression I frequently catch myself using with unconscious humour. "Was it here?"

"Yes," she said. "Oh, yes! But not in this house."

So perhaps she had been in church this morning early, in which case I certainly should not know her.

I said: "I'm sorry. Perhaps I should remember your name."

"I have no name."

I experienced, then, a swift thrill of excitement at the words, an instant quickening of expectation. I said quickly: "Is your name Joy?"

"No!"

"Well, then, a very happy Christmas to you too."

"I beg your pardon?"

And all my excitement turned to ashes in a moment.

I had been wrong, mistaken. This is the skeleton in my personal cupboard. Barbara believes me a cynic in everything, but in this I have been a greater idealist than Gyp ever was. Always—from a time now so far

distant that no distinct memory reaches back to it—I have held the image of a woman sacred. When I was young she was beautiful no doubt, but later I know that it was a quality of mind that I sought in her: some acuteness of perception that would answer me as surely as the echo of my own voice, something more than intuition, more than wit and intelligence or less than both these, someone who would come fluent in a language which I have already half forgotten. When the girl spoke it was Blake of course who leaped to my mind. I have no name, she said, I have no name.

I have no name :
I am but two days old.
What shall I call thee?
I happy am ;
Joy is my name.
Sweet Joy befall thee.

But she did not mean Blake. She did not mean anything. It was a senseless remark merely, frivolous, a childish teasing. In my disappointment I was bitterly angry with this flippant young woman with the husky voice, product of her inane generation which nowhere scratches the surface of things, demanding only a superficial brilliance. My reference to Joy and to greetings only puzzled her.

"You are talking in riddles," she complained. "I don't like riddles." She said this petulantly, just as Kay might have said it. I could picture the girl pouting in her silly fashion.

I began to play the piano again, rather loudly, she irritated me so much. "Are you staying here?"

"Just passing."

"You asked me," I reminded her, "whether you were supposed to be in here. The answer is that you

are not. This part of the hotel is reserved for residents only."

"Oh, but I'm special!"

"Are you?"

"I'm a very old friend of the family."

"Do you know Mrs Connor?"

"Who is Mrs Connor?"

"My sister. The rest of the family are out. I don't recall that you are a friend of mine. I'm sorry you have wasted your time."

"Oh, I haven't! I came to see you."

I broke off from the piano. Determined to make an end to this charade I asked her bluntly: "Why?"

"I wanted to see if you were as disagreeable as they said you were." And she added in a tone of great sorrow: "I'm afraid you are."

Her impudence staggered me. I was saved from being violently rude only by the opening of the door at the far end of the room and a new voice, a man's. He called out: "Are you ready? I've been looking for you all over the place."

He remained there, at some distance. She raised her voice to answer. "Yes; coming." She said to me: "It's been so nice! I'd heard so much about you. Good-bye."

The man called again: "Lucia!"

She moved in obedience to the summons, and I turned in the direction of her steps. "Wait——"

I should have guessed long before this. I asked her: "Are you Lucia Cromwell?"

"Yes," she said. "Good-bye."

So this is Gyp's Lucia, whose beauty transcends the meaning of age. This is the girl of whom he wrote in his

letters: 'she is lovely as a song, original as a summer's day'.

How funny.

How very funny.

I did remember her, however, when she had gone and I was considering the enigma of that first question: you don't remember me? It had not occurred to me before, hearing Gyp speak of her, but I did know her once. I was twelve and she must have been a year or two younger than Kay is now. She was certainly very much smaller than Kay. It was when Paris died and Cromwell came down. He stayed, if I remember, somewhere in the village—no doubt he refused to stay in the house—and Lucia was with him. We used to see her sometimes, with a nurse-woman trailing her along the sands by the hand; a diminutive, Dresden figure in frothy white lace. We used to lie up on the cliffs sometimes and watch them, Barbara, Gyp and I. They served, I think, many purposes: they were a coastguard patrol searching for us, and we were, of course, smugglers; they were the Enemy invading our territory, and in imagination we rolled boulders down on their heads; they were ambushed and evaded, shot and stoned and pierced through with arrows, but since we remained above the cliffs and they walked below them, they were quite oblivious of these disasters. But once they came upon us at the water's edge and stopped while the nurse spoke to us, her face pulled into lines of compassion and her voice so muted that we supposed she was very miserable, never associating her aura of sadness with ourselves, or with our father's death. Our own grieving was violent, private and brief, and by then completed—as much as it ever would be completed. And once—strange that I should

have forgotten—the Dresden child was sent to play with us. She became our captive, but since she did exactly as she was told with the greatest willingness, we soon tired of the game. Gyp and Barbara must have gone off, for I clearly remember that I was given the task of guarding her, and that growing bored with this, I did not like to abandon my responsibility. There was a rope at the top of the cliff which we used as an aid to the ascent, and I solved my problems by taking this and tying her to a tree while I went off to find the others. I cannot recall that any of us ever went back, so I suppose she must have freed herself, or else the nurse found her. We saw them again on the beach once or twice after that, but we were never asked to play with her again.

We forget too easily the contradictions in our childhood selves. There is a milestone placed somewhere in each of our lives, early or late, which we afterwards look back upon as a starting point; a threshold of adolescence which, having been crossed, consigns all that has gone before to obscurity. This Kay who dresses up her doll and comes to me with wise questions, another Kay will one day disclaim. Snake-like we slough off our early years, excusing and dismissing them by saying that we were young: forgetting that we never were. We say that this living is a continuous process, but we do not really understand what we are talking about. When I was not playing at smugglers upon the cliffs I was playing Chopin with equal absorption, and I saw nothing incongruous in going from one to the other. What I did at twelve is just as much part of me now as what I did yesterday. Lucia remembers the incident, evidently.

The day was so full, being Christmas Day, so many people talking to me, so much to do, that I forgot to

tell Gyp when he returned from church. And then afterwards I thought I would not tell him at all, but this would have been a mistake in case he learned of Lucia's visit from a third person. So I went to find him sometime during the evening, and told him that I had met an old friend of his. He was talking to Barbara, but he broke off.

"Who was that?"

"Lucia Cromwell."

Barbara said: "Old Ironsides' daughter? The one like a little doll?"

"I don't know," I said, "if she is like a doll now. But I don't imagine so."

"She was here?" Barbara said, and I said yes, she was in the hotel this morning, and I spoke to her.

Gyp said nothing at all.

Barbara was curious, but she was not really interested, and after a moment I left them. Quite soon Gyp followed me, as I knew he would. I told him exactly what had happened, expecting him to ask the meaning of Barbara's comment, but he seemed to have forgotten it. He said quietly, but in an intense voice: "And I missed her. Oh, God, I was out. Did she ask for me?"

"She didn't even mention you."

I said this so that he could not misunderstand it, but I don't think he even heard. I felt a touch on my arm, and then heard Penelope's voice. She led me across the room and introduced me to a young man called Dennis Roussel, with whom, she assures me, she is desperately in love. He seems very nice.

January has brought the snow at last, and Kay is up on the downs all day long with the toboggan Gill made for her. Sometimes Barbara goes with her, sometimes

Gill, who is now entirely under her spell and does whatever she tells him. Sometimes Kay goes up with the other children from the hotel; she is more friendly with them now, which is an excellent thing, for they attend the school at Croxton which she herself will go to. She begins in another week, and has been into the town with Barbara to get her school uniform. She is very proud of it, and has described it to me in detail. It sounds dreadful, but I tell Kay I am sure it must be very nice. Most of the guests have gone after the holidays, but there are six or seven rooms still occupied, and Gyp is well satisfied.

The days are all the same now, there is little to record.

I have been lying in bed for more than two hours unable to sleep. Insomnia is common, I believe, among the blind, to whom night and day are one. We lack the soporific comfort of switching a light off, closing the eyes. My roseate images persist by night as by day; I am glad of them, but now, when I would be rid of them, I cannot. I hear many sounds, too, which are a distraction from sleep—the clock chiming in the hall, the wind in the chimney-place; but also other smaller sounds like the falling snow and the continuous sea which another person would not be aware of. It is not that my hearing is more acute. It is simply that I rely upon sounds to a degree that makes my interpretation of them instinctive; by association they come to me with wider meanings, infinitely broader suggestions of scenes and movement.

I have read a little in braille, but the book is tedious—Dickens; I have never liked Dickens. So I have fetched my braille writer and my journal again.

Today I went up on the downs with Kay and stood at the top of the run listening to the children, the long

hiss of the toboggans down the hillside, the laughter and the cries. Kay went down the run, and almost at once I heard a sharp impact and Kay's cry well below me. I heard quick exclamations all about me, and the loose shuffle of snow as the children ran off. I snatched at a child's arm and asked what had happened. I must have shouted, for the child broke away in alarm without answering. And then a woman's voice spoke from behind me.

"It's all right. She is walking up the hill again."

I turned to face her. I was sweating, I know, with frightful uncertainty.

"What happened?"

"She ran into a tree. I think her sledge is smashed."

So it was nothing. I felt calm at once, and ashamed. I said: "It's you again."

"Yes. You are good at voices, aren't you? Here is the girl."

And then Kay came up laughing, and told me that she had been pitched into the snow and winded herself.

The damage to her toboggan could not have been great, for Kay and Lucia repaired it very quickly between them, borrowing my stick to hammer one of the runners straight. Kay went down on it again, and then Lucia went down. When she came up the hill again she came back to me. I asked her what she was doing here, and she told me that she had brought skis, but there was not enough snow. So she had come to watch the children. I said to her: "You are living here now?"

"Croxtan way," she answered, as though she made a gesture with her hand. "I came over by car, this is the best part. Can I drive you both back to the hotel?"

I would have refused, but Kay, thinking no doubt of the long pull home with her toboggan, was enthusiastic.

And then, when Kay had gone down the run for the last time, I said: "Gyp will be there, you know."

"Your brother?" Lucia said, as if she didn't know who Gyp was. "Will he?"

"Do you want to see him?"

"Not particularly."

"You had an affair."

"He told you," Lucia said, discovering this. "Yes, I suppose so. He is nice. I'm sorry."

"It's over, then?"

"Oh—yes! Over. He told you why?"

"Yes, he told me."

"The girl is coming up again. What's her name?"

"Kay," I said. "She is my sister's child, my niece." And I said quickly, before Kay came: "May I ask you one question? Something that has been puzzling me."

Lucia made a small, interrogative sound.

"I'm curious," I said. "Were you ever in love with Gyp?"

She was silent for so long that I was afraid Kay would interrupt us, but she spoke at last. She spoke very quietly, and in a different voice.

Though I had half-expected this answer, when it came it surprised me.

PART THREE

Epilogue

KAY, dragging her toboggan up the hill with panting haste because she supposed they were waiting for her, saw them speaking together and paused. The lady was sifting a small circular patch of snow idly with the toe of one small boot, and she was looking down at this, so that the pointed woollen hood concealed her face. She was entirely in blue, but so dark that from here it appeared black against the whiteness: blue hood and blue woollen jerkin, narrow blue matching trousers bunched with a strap over her boots, blue mittens holding a stick the purpose of which Kay did not understand, with a spike and a little wheel at the end. Kay's Uncle Jonathan in his tweedy grey overcoat looked tall beside her, though he was not really tall. He held his head intently as though he listened with great attention to something she was saying. Watching them, Kay sensed that she herself was forgotten. With an intuitive discretion she turned her back and watched the toboggans swishing down the glassy run, slowing into loose snow far below her. She screwed up her eyes. The lady had dark glasses, and Kay wished that she too had dark glasses and could make her face serene and not dazzled by the glare. She heard her uncle calling her and turned back, gathering the rough cord of her toboggan into her fist.

When she came up to them her uncle's face was towards her, and for a moment she forgot, and imagined that he was watching her. But when she moved up beside them his eyes did not follow her but continued to

gaze down over the hillside, as if there was something there far off that held his interest. Though she was accustomed to this, it required an effort of will not to turn her head to see what he was looking at. "Kay," he said without moving. "This is Miss Cromwell."

But the lady smiled at her suddenly, an intimate smile between them, reminding Kay that they had both already been down the run on the same toboggan, and said: "Lucia," correcting him.

In her mind Kay called her 'Lucia', rejecting the formal title as the smile bid her. She said politely: "Thank you very much," and then could not remember why she had said this.

The car was very small and seemed already half-filled by a pair of eight-foot wooden skis thrust in between the front seats and across the back, so that there was barely room for Kay and her toboggan. When she was safely in, Kay remembered that she had not shown her uncle his door, but Lucia managed this very well, the way he liked, just guiding his hand on to the handle and letting him manage the rest by himself. But instead of looking pleased, Jonathan looked angry, and Kay would have said she was sorry. But she held her tongue for Lucia's sake.

The car started off with a sideways motion, sliding. The wheels skidded round and then, finding the road surface beneath the snow, took hold. Lucia drove very slowly, and after a moment slipped her hood back, letting her blonde hair loose.

She was so beautiful that Kay at once and without thought put up a hand and touched her own hair, wishing that it was fair; and then, strangely shy, she dropped her hands to her lap. She was prepared to sit in silence while the grown-ups talked, content to watch Lucia and

listen to her, and to enjoy the funny, slippery movement of the car that was like a ship. She cleared a patch in the small back window, rubbing the frost off with her warm hand, and watched their caterpillar tracks slipping away behind. But Lucia said: "Kay," and she turned quickly.

"Kay, if we have more snow you must try my skis sometime."

And all the way down to Sagastrand Lucia talked to her, asking whether she was looking forward to going to her new school, telling her that she must come to Lucia's house one day for tea, praising her toboggan and asking where she got it. At the end of the carriage-way, by the twin pillars, she stopped the car and Jonathan got out immediately, as if they had already agreed to walk from here. He thanked Lucia curtly and crooked his arm for Kay to take it, which was unusual. Kay bundled her toboggan out and hurried to him. With a last smile and a wave, Lucia drove off.

As they walked Kay said in wonder: "Are you cross, Uncle Jon?"

He laughed, but not at once. "No, Kay, of course not. Why should I be cross?"

She did not know why. But he was cross all the same.

Barbara met them at the door. She was wearing her dark-brown dress, high at the throat and bare of ornament, which Kay associated with formal occasions, and tan court shoes, and her hair was so perfect that Kay stared in question, supposing that she was going out somewhere.

"Run upstairs and change," Barbara said. "There is someone to see you."

Her tone, like her dress, was precise, and Kay, foreseeing no pleasure in the visitor and thinking that it must be someone from the school, said unwillingly:

"To see me?"

"Your father, Kay. In the library."

"*Daddy!*——"

It was the cry as much as the word itself which made Barbara wince and withdraw into a tight shell of pain—an instant cry of excitement and pleasure so intense that it seemed to transfigure the child. Kay hugged her, and as abruptly rushed past her into the house. Barbara turned to remind her that she must first change her clothes, but checked herself, ashamed to delay her even this much more, knowing that Kay would not forget.

"She is pleased," Jonathan said.

Barbara nodded, and remembering that he could not see this, said: "Yes. She has always been fond of Hugh." And then, collecting herself, she said: "He phoned this morning while you were out, asking if he could come. He phoned from Croxton, apparently he was passing through." And then she said simply: "He wanted to see Kay."

"You don't mind?"

"I'm not inhuman. Kay is fond of him."

"I wonder."

"Whether she is fond of him?"

"Whether you are inhuman."

Jonathan was standing with his hands resting on the curved handle of his stick, his face towards the hall where Kay had gone. Barbara glanced at him quickly and said: "I'm sorry. I'm not in the mood for your cynical humour."

"It's not cynical," Jonathan said, "and it's not particularly funny. Why don't you go in and talk to him?"

"To Hugh? I think he would prefer to see Kay alone."

"Why do you put the blame on to him?"

"I'm not putting the blame on to anyone," Barbara answered. "What blame?"—and suddenly, seeing that he knew so much, she cried out in bitter misery: "Oh, damn you!—why can't you mind your own business. I've already spoken to Hugh if you want to know."

This was true, but in its implications so far from the truth that Jonathan merely smiled. He guessed correctly that her speaking to Hugh had consisted of a polite exchange of greetings, an enquiry after his parents, a request that he wait in the library while she went to tell Kay.

Jonathan said: "Are you coming in?"

"In a moment."

But long after Jonathan had entered the house and the tapping of his stick had gone, she stood in the doorway. The landscape in white was very lovely, the curve of the carriage-way under trees printed black on white, save where the wind had piled the snow in drifts against them all on one side, or it was held heavy in the crook of branch and bole. Evergreens nearer the house carried the snow like some massive blossom. It seemed monstrous that it should be so lovely and yet have no meaning for her. It occurred to her, with a pang of dismay, that perhaps she was in truth excluded from the comfort of these things for ever; that, like the child in the tale *The Snow Queen*, she had collected in her eye and in her heart some fragment of the mirror of cynicism, which distorts the image of universal beauty and poisons the understanding, and sours it. Even the consolation of private grief was denied her. Jonathan, blind Jonathan, had seen through her, and in his cruel, disinterested fashion

pitied her. And she remembered after a moment that the name of the child in *The Snow Queen* had been Kay.

She had advanced a little way into the open, and now she turned back, reminded by the bitter cold that she was out of doors without a coat; and going into the house again encountered Hugh in the hall.

He paused uncertainly, slower to regain his composure than she. With a familiar gesture he ran his hand over the back of his head, smoothing the fair hair, and then his hand fell to his side.

Barbara said: "You've seen Kay?" and he nodded.

"She's gone off to change."

"But I told her——"

"Yes," Hugh said, "I know. It's my fault. I heard her come in and called her." He glanced up at the stairs. "She's changing now. I thought she might like to come out for a run. If you don't mind, that is."

"Of course not."

"I should have asked you," Hugh said.

"It doesn't matter."

Hille came down the stairs and vanished through the door at the end of the hall to the kitchens, and at once the door swung again and a maid came through with a long broom. Hugh said awkwardly: "Could we go into the library for a minute? It's like trying to talk . . . on a railway station."

He stood aside, and she went first, and he closed the door behind them. There was a heaped fire burning in the grate and she moved towards it, aware of his restless movements behind her, aware of him. He fingered one or two of the heavy morocco-bound volumes in the shelves which went from floor to ceiling, and said at last:

"It's about Kay."

At once she straightened, as if to defend herself.

"She is happy here."

He was quick to correct her: "Oh, yes, of course! Anyone can see she is happy. I've never seen her looking so well, I congratulate you."

"Then——"

"Perhaps it's me, not Kay, I want to talk about. Babs I"—a slip of the tongue—"I should like to see Kay more often. Not here. Perhaps at Croxton, at her school? I could see her sometimes during the week."

"Have you mentioned this to her?"

"No."

"And how long do you propose that this should go on?"

"I hadn't really thought——"

"No," Barbara said. "But you must." She gave him a rare, direct look, no longer averting her eyes from him, as though she memorised every particular of his face. "You can't expect Kay to understand, you mustn't *ask* her. You can't divide her life into halves, a child must *belong*. I think that's important. When she is older she can choose. Not now."

"By then it will be too late."

"It may be. I'm sorry."

He said nothing, and presently she added:

"We have ourselves to consider also."

"Ourselves," he repeated, as if it was a word of a foreign language whose meaning for the moment escaped him.

"You will have your wife to consider," Barbara reminded him. "You must think of her too."

"No," Hugh said. "That's off."

"Your engagement? Oh, I'm sorry. But you will marry again. One day, Hugh. It still applies."

"Ourselves," he said again. "You said ourselves. What about you?"

"Kay is all I have now."

She was ashamed, immediately of this sentiment, but he replied:

"She is all I have too."

But his answer came too close upon the heels of her own, so that she had no time to consider it, and spoke from an anxiety to deny her previous self-pity; and this made her harsh:

"The law, however, is on my side."

It was this quickness of withdrawal that Jonathan had found inhuman in her, and she understood this too late. Hugh replied curtly:

"We are not in court now."

"We are always in court, you and I."

Again.

"Yes," he said surprisingly. "Sitting in judgment one upon the other—funny! How well you put it! I suppose because you never had any respect for me."

"That's not true!"

"Isn't it, though? You had no respect and I had too much. That was a mistake, it led us into endless analysis, endless arguments . . ."

"Must we repeat them?"

"Let me finish. It led to arguments, and there are only two ways of ending an argument like that. One is to walk out——"

"Yes."

"——and the other was to thrash you. Perhaps I should have thrashed you."

"Perhaps."

"Except that I never could have."

"No," Barbara said, "you never could. Is there any point in continuing with this discussion?"

He was saved from replying by the opening of the door behind them. Kay, neatly dressed in a pale-blue coat and matching pixie hood, her hands big in fur gloves, looked quickly from one to the other of her parents. She said with surprise, hopefully: "Is Mummy coming?"

"Yes," Hugh said swiftly. And before Barbara could interrupt him said: "We're all coming—run and fetch your mother's warm coat, Kay. And a scarf; and you'll want a scarf yourself, it's freezing outside."

Kay was gone at once, before he had finished.

Barbara said evenly: "That was foolish, Hugh. It will only disappoint her. I'm not coming."

"Yes, you are."

"No."

"You'll have to tell Kay yourself then. I'm not going to."

"Very well."

But when Kay returned with her musquash coat and her gloves, and a brown scarf chosen to match her dress, Barbara was unable to tell her. She permitted Hugh to hold the heavy coat for her, and accepted the grateful, precocious clasp of Kay's hand, clumsy through their gloves, because she did not know how to refuse or avoid these things.

Hugh's car was parked at the side of the house, and Barbara and Kay waited under the porch while he walked round to fetch it.

A WEEK later, when the school term began, Gyp drove Kay with her boxes into Croxton. It was Kay herself, with an unexpectedly stubborn independence, who insisted that Barbara should not accompany them, perhaps with a precocious awareness that the parting—though for a week only, for she would return at the week-end—would be more easily borne by both of them at Sagastrand. The other two children from the hotel, who were boarding full-time, had gone back a day early, when their parents returned to the North.

Pupils who were boarding, according to the letter Barbara had received, were expected to be in school by four o'clock in the afternoon in readiness for the following day's work; but Kay went early, and by four o'clock Gyp was back at the house. He answered Barbara's anxious questions with an assurance that Kay had settled-in perfectly well, the house-mistress had seemed agreeable, Kay wanted nothing, had already made her friends. Then, from habit, Gyp went and looked in the hotel register for new names, and there was one. It was a curiously extravagant signature, and it was a moment before he could interpret the loops and whorls and make out the name *Bosham Vaughan*.

It was much longer before he remembered where he had seen the name before.

"He is an artist," Elizabeth said. "He came this afternoon soon after you'd left. He isn't staying long—a week, I think he said. He said . . . I don't know . . .

something about painting the place before the snow's gone." Seeing no point in any of Gyp's questions, and suspecting herself at fault, she said: "Barbara wasn't here. I put him in seventeen, is that all right?"

Perfectly, Gyp told her. "Is he upstairs now?"

"He has gone out, I think."

Penelope, passing Gyp on the stairs, said: "Have you seen the newest arrival?"

"The artist?"

"Yes! Do you know who he is? You remember the harbour picture that Shaun bought in Croxton? Well, he painted it." She was excited that Bosham Vaughan should be staying in the hotel. "He's jolly good. I've been watching him, he's doing the harbour again, only all wintry. I've been out talking to him."

And then, with remembered disappointment, she added that he didn't look a bit like an artist, "very ordinary."

When Gyp walked through the snow and discovered a ginger-haired young man in a shabby duffle-coat seated in front of an easel at the edge of the cliffs, he found the description apt. He did not know that Penelope had described him to Bossie as a 'dear old shaggy dog', and that Bossie found this apt also. Bossie stood up to shake Gyp's hand, not pleased at a further interruption. Since he had come out here he had had a succession of curious people peering over his shoulder. He shook Gyp's hand, and then swung his arms and trampled the snow to warm himself. The canvas on the easel was bare. He had not yet touched his paints. He had been making a series of pencil sketches on a small block, trying, he said, different compositions, various viewpoints. There was evidence in the snow along the cliff that he had tried a great many.

"It must be difficult," Gyp said, "to paint snow."

"Snow? I don't know. I suppose it's difficult."

"Being all white, I mean."

"White?" Bossie said. "It isn't white. It's blue, and green, and yellow, and red—hardly any of it's white. Look"—he threw out a hand, palm up, towards the house. "Where the sun gets it. Yellow as a banana."

Gyp said that he supposed so. As far as he could see, the tract of virgin whiteness continued unbroken, except for the footprints, as far as the trees. He said: "I saw an exhibition of your work in Croxton."

"Oh, yes? Last week."

"No, this was some time ago. There was a portrait. *Young Elizabethan* I think it was called."

"I know. Crayon thing of Lucy. Like it?"

Though he had intended to make his enquiries casual, carefully worded, idle-sounding, Gyp was surprised by this into an unguarded answer. He said: "Yes—I was going to ask you. But I thought it wasn't for sale." And in a voice at once so eager that Bossie laughed.

"No; I meant *did* you like it, not *would* you. Sorry! No, it never was for sale. You'd be surprised how many people have wanted to buy that picture!" Bossie sat down on his camp stool and took up the block and pencil again. "If you want it, you'll have to ask Lucy. She's got it. You know her, of course?"

"Yes," Gyp said.

Bossie was sketching again, making light, radiating lines to mark off the perspective. "I remember her mentioning you."

Gyp was looking at the sketch. "Is that how you do it?" he said. "I suppose you'll transfer the drawing to the canvas?"

"That's the idea. When I get a good one."

"I've often wished I could paint. What did she say about me, then?"

Bossie hesitated. He went quickly in his mind through Lucia's remarks and tried to find one that he could repeat, and failed. He said: "Oh—said she'd met a Mr Paris, you know. Said you lived in a castle at Cravenmere." Unwilling to be cross-questioned on the subject, he added lightly: "I suppose you're crazy about her?" and turning with a smile, knew that he had made a mistake.

"Did Lucia," Gyp enquired, "tell you this also?"

Bossie ran his fingers awkwardly through his hair and ended with a gesture of deprecation. "Lord, no! Nothing of the kind. You mustn't mind me. It's just that . . . Oh, everybody is crazy about her, you know. I've been crazy about her myself for years." He said thoughtfully and with regret: "What an ass I was to promise her that portrait! I could have sold it a dozen times over."

"You've known her long?" Gyp asked, unable somehow to believe that they were speaking of the same person.

"Three or four years," Bossie told him. "Nearly four. She puts up with me because I don't bother her . . . generally. She models for me sometimes. I suppose you could say she works for me, off and on. On and off."

"Other people," Gyp persisted, doggedly following this reasoning, ". . . bother her?"

"They usually want to marry her."

"I see. And you don't."

"Not me! I know her too well. She's an absolute bitch really . . . And then, of course, she's a dear too. It depends how you look at it, I dare say."

Conscious that he had been, perhaps, unjust to the

absent Lucia, Bossie paused to consider how he might explain her. He made a circle and a zigzagging line on the block which had nothing to do with the sketch.

"She is a very beautiful girl," Gyp said.

"Ah, that's just it! If one could only leave it at that! Like a picture in a frame, have a jolly good look and push off. You can't though, nobody can. It's not really Lucy's fault, after all. It's like . . . well, it's like a beauty spot somewhere in the country where people come every day and say, 'My God, how beautiful!' and strew orange-peel all over the place, and pick the flowers, and carve their names up and down the trees, and light fires. And you tell them they mustn't behave like this, and they go on doing it; and you tell them again; and it doesn't make any difference how often you tell them—and in the end you put up a bloody great railing all round, with spikes on top."

He broke off with a quick laugh that discounted the serious undertones of this speech, surprised at himself for having said so much, wondering why he had told Gyp this. His drawing block was defaced with numerous scribbles. He ripped off the top sheet, screwed it into a ball and then, remembering his own words, thrust it into the pocket of his coat.

"You mustn't mind me."

"A railing," Gyp said, "with spikes on top."

"Yes. Well, then you see there are people whom even railings won't keep out."

"And what happens to them?"

"I imagine they hurt themselves,"

But it was evident from the offhand way in which Bossie spoke—from the fact that he said these things at all—that he did not aim his remarks at Gyp. Gyp was sure in his mind that Lucia had not told Bossie; that she

would never tell him or anyone else. He did not know why he was sure of this; but the certainty remained. It occurred to him that Bossie had repeated this analogy before and elsewhere; that it was learned, at least in part, from Lucia herself. He had a sense of listening to Lucia herself telling him, explaining something. He wondered if Bossie was one of those who had hurt themselves on the spikes, and decided that he was not; or else that the hurt had been very slight. To test this assumption, he put another question, continuing the parallel:

"I suppose these people are always looking for a key to open the door in the railings—is that it?"

"That's the point!" Bossie exclaimed. "There isn't a door. No door at all."

Gyp could have laughed at that, so sure that he was wrong. But he said gravely, "Are you sure?"

"No," Bossie said. He stood up and folded his stool and easel, tucking the canvas under one arm. "I'm talking a lot of nonsense, I expect. I'm going to try further down. Lucy's a nice girl if you don't take her too seriously. She might let you have the portrait, I can't think what she wants it for herself." He prepared to move on, and paused. He had taken a liking to Gyp, and would have liked to help him. "I'll ask her, if you like."

"Thank you," Gyp said. "No."

"Oh, well . . . you ask her, anyway. Tell her I said I'd like you to have it, say I promised it to you. Never know. She might agree."

Gyp said again, "Thank you. But I don't expect I shall be seeing her."

"Oh, you'll see her when she comes here."

"Here?"

"She'll be down sometime today or tomorrow, she said she'd drop in. We came once before, you know. At

Christmas. But I don't think you were around. See you later. In the hotel."

Bossie trudged off along the cliff beside the fence, his footprints deep under the weight he carried, his face turned towards the harbour. After a moment Gyp went back into the house.

There was a letter in the morning post for Barbara, and Penelope, finding it on the hall table, carried it into the office where Barbara was working. She dropped it on to the desk over Barbara's shoulder. "Letter for you."

"Thanks," Barbara said. She went on with her work without looking at it. Then, becoming aware that Penelope was still standing there, she glanced at the envelope and recognised Shaun's handwriting.

Penelope was playing with a yellow-ivory paperknife, balancing its point on the wood with one finger. She said: "Hugh was here last week."

"Yes."

"Gave me quite a turn," Penelope said, and laughed to remember the turn he had given her. "I was coming downstairs and he had his back to me. I thought it was Shaun."

Barbara said calmly: "There is a superficial resemblance."

"You noticed it too?"

Penelope's cheeks were bright with an unnatural flush, and her voice was pitched high. She let the paperknife fall flat, and with a flick of her finger spun it, watching to see which way it would point; absorbed in this game. She went on spinning the knife until Barbara, with a deliberately unhurried movement, took it from her and placed it beyond her reach on top of Shaun's letter. Barbara's finger rested there, touching the envelope. She said evenly: "You know who this is from?"

Without looking at it, Penelope said: "Yes: I know. I know about all the others, too. I read most of them."

"You *read* them!"

Penelope said again: "Yes."

Barbara's face, upturned to her so that she could not escape it, had the extreme pallor of a death-mask. Her voice was scarcely audible:

"You . . . steamed them open, I take it. And read them."

"Yes, I did."

Abruptly, Barbara turned her back. She took the letter and tore it across and dropped it into the waste-paper basket by her feet.

"I have done that," she said, "to all the others. You read them, Penny. I never did—after the first. Will you believe that?"

"Yes, I believe it," Penelope said. It had been clear from Shaun's letters themselves that Barbara had never answered any of them. She admitted it quite simply, as though it had never been in question. "I believe it." She avoided Barbara's curious look.

"Penny," Barbara said, "Penny. I'm sorry. I am sorry, truly. Believe me, I never meant to hurt you. Whatever I did——"

"You sent Shaun away."

"Yes, I sent Shaun away. Penny one day . . . you'll understand that it was better for Shaun to go . . . before it was too late. He was no good, Penny. No good for you, no good for anybody. He would never have married you. He never meant to."

Penelope said: "I know."

Barbara raised her head in surprise. She had been looking down at the ledger, the half-completed account forms. Now she raised her head and said quickly, swift to grasp at this understanding: "This Dennis Roussell——"

Penelope interrupted her impatiently. "Yes, I shall marry Dennis, I expect. You don't think I care about Shaun *now*, do you? I don't give a hoot for Shaun! It's Hugh . . ."

"What has this got to do with Hugh?"

"I noticed you all went off together. With Kay. You seem to be getting along better these days."

"We are civilised people. As far as I know we have always got along perfectly well."

"You were divorced all the same."

A slow flush came into Barbara's face. She said carefully: "There are some things, Penny, I can't discuss with you."

"I thought you hated him."

"No. I never hated him."

"He's coming again, isn't he? I heard him say he was coming again. When he kissed you. At the door."

Listening to these questions, Barbara had a sense of unreality. It was not possible to believe that this was her sister cross-questioning her, driving her back upon herself with the whip of suggested accusation. She had to fight to prevent herself from anger, pressing her lips tight to suppress the retorts that came so readily to her tongue. A sense of absurdity saved her, preserving her balance, giving her laughter as a weapon with which to defend herself. Laughing, she said: "You're not jealous of Hugh?—*are* you Penny!"

And following this barb with her swift glance, her mischievous, puckish look, she saw with instant regret that there might be a grain of truth in it, Penelope was so quick with her denial.

"No!" Penelope cried at once. "But I was sorry for him. He's had a rotten time, hasn't he. Hugh's rather a . . . puritan in his way, isn't he?"

"In a way I suppose he is. But I hope he won't always have a rotten time, Penny."

"You mean—— You may marry again? You two?"

Barbara smiled at the tone. "It isn't impossible," she said. "Perhaps even that."

"You haven't told him about . . . Shaun?"

Turning to answer, Barbara paused. The reply that she had prepared was forgotten. Looking then at her sister's tortured expression, her uneasy fidgeting, she made the discovery that she had been wrong: she had mistaken guilt for malice. Once she knew this, the urgency of Penelope's last question became immediately clear: Have you told Shaun? Have *you* told Shaun? It was true, Hugh in his ways had something of the puritan in him, something quite unyielding, some inflexible code not common in this century, which she had both mocked and admired in him. He was kind, he would forgive many things, but some things he would not forgive. Barbara did not think that he would forgive her Shaun. You haven't told him about Shaun?

"No," Barbara said. "Have you?"

Wild-eyed, Penelope stared at her, fist to her mouth, all her colour gone. Then she turned and fled from the room.

Weeping, in tears, there were many explanations: I was so angry, I was mad, I meant to get my own back, I thought—I thought—so many things. Spite, it was spite or I was sorry for Hugh, I am fond of Hugh—yes—I thought you would break him as you broke Shaun, but it isn't true, it wasn't true, it's too late. I wrote a letter, Barbara, forgive me, forgive me.

I forgive you, of course.

But you are right; it is too late, I think.

3

PENELOPE'S confession and the violence of her self-recriminations had this effect: like a violent storm they discharged the tension in the air, releasing undercurrents of enmity and dispersing them, so that a new frankness and a new friendship was possible between the sisters. No longer avoiding Barbara, Penelope now sought her company. In the manner of friends meeting after a prolonged separation they found that they had much to tell each other. At first Barbara said little, made reticent by the lifelong habit of regarding Penelope as a child, but listening to her younger sister and answering her many questions, which were no longer impertinent but sprang from a deep, and even a considered sympathy, it came to her that Penelope was grown into a woman; perhaps not suddenly, but nevertheless unnoticed; and now that they shared so much intimate knowledge between them, Barbara in her turn found herself speaking with an openness rare in her.

But after that first day she would allow no further reference to Penelope's letter to Hugh, and gently refused to discuss its probable effect; and perhaps because of this, Penelope told Gyp.

Though Gyp had been ignorant of the cause, neither the estrangement nor its abrupt ending had escaped him, but when Penelope told him what she had done, and the way of it, he realised the extent to which his own preoccupation had blinded him to the needs of others. What shall I do? Penelope asked him, begging

his advice. What shall I do, Gyp? Should I go and see Hugh? And he told her no, it is between them, Hugh must come to his own decisions. We must all make our own decisions in the end. And when Penelope turned to him in question, not understanding or half-understanding this, he knew that it was of himself that he had been speaking.

The previous day, returning from a solitary walk along the cliffs, he had returned to the house in time to see a small black car drive up under the porch. Jonathan had got out, and the car had turned, made a circle in the carriage-way and had gone back towards the road, and, when it came level with him, Gyp had seen that it was Lucia. She had waved to him without stopping and driven on, passing between the stone pillars, and out of sight.

He had not asked Jonathan, but Jonathan had told him. She has to come down to see Vaughan. He wants things from his studio and she brings them down. We've been out several times; she runs me around, a little fresh air. It leaves Penny free to go off with that Roussell chap.

Gyp had asked: Why don't you ask her in? and Jonathan said at once, My dear chap, I thought it might upset you. Why don't you just forget her, Gyp? She lives here. You'll be seeing her, here and there, for the rest of your life. It's no good being dramatic about it. Why not be realistic? There are other fish in the sea. She doesn't love you, Gyp.

Did she tell you?

And just for a moment Jonathan had hesitated, as if unwilling to voice the brutal answer: that it must be perfectly obvious.

Gyp had asked only one question more : Why are you going out with her ?

Why ?

It is convenient, that's all. She offered to drive me and I accepted. She has the time, she's quite pleased to be able to do something useful, and it relieves Penelope. Do you think I'm overcome with her beauty ? She could be as ugly as sin for all I know or care. If I want some intelligent conversation I go and talk to Barbara—or come to you. I am in the way here—do you think I don't know ? I jumped at the chance of getting out without putting anybody to inconvenience. You know what I think of your precious Lucia Cromwell ? I think she's been useless all her life and it gives her a chance to do something *for* someone for a change ! Still—and Jonathan's blind gaze had for the first time altered its direction and turned towards Gyp—still, if it upsets you, old fellow, I'll stop going out with her. It doesn't matter to me ! It shouldn't be very hard to find someone else—Gill. What about Gill ? He can drive. We could take the station wagon when you aren't using it.

And Gyp had told him : There is no need.

In the afternoon Gyp went to Barbara and asked her if she would accompany him to Croxton. It was necessary for him to go ; perhaps Barbara would like to come also and perhaps take Kay out to tea somewhere ?

Barbara agreed at once.

In the station wagon, climbing up into the downs that were now patched with green where the thaw was beginning, Gyp told Barbara what Penelope had said. Barbara made a gesture of annoyance, guessing that he had made her come in the station wagon for this reason, so that she could not avoid discussion, but he said : “ I

am breaking my word in repeating this to you. Penny made me promise not to tell anyone, not even you."

"It was so unlike Gyp to break his word in anything that Barbara raised her eyebrows and waited curiously to learn what he had to say.

"It's time we had a talk," Gyp said. "The hotel is going well now, I don't think we need to worry any longer. We are getting known, and in time . . ."

"Yes," Barbara said. "You were right."

Almost with surprise now she remembered that none of them—not Penelope, nor Jonathan, nor herself—had believed that the hotel would ever be a success. Only Elizabeth had accepted Gyp's simple confidence, and she because she had never put it to question, nor voiced the doubts which the rest had expressed so freely. Barbara remembered herself telling Elizabeth: I think he's barmy.

"I was right," Gyp agreed, "up to a point. And up to a point you were right too. You accused me, didn't you, of trying to put the clock back?"

"The family? Jonathan seems happy enough. That was the main object, wasn't it?"

Gyp hesitated at the sharpness of her tone, the edge she gave to the words. "Not," he said, "Jonathan only. But I'm glad you said that. Ever since Jonathan came—before he came—you have resented him. Why?"

Barbara did not answer, but Gyp waited, knowing that she must consider the question. He did not prompt her, and after a long moment of silence she spoke:

"Shall I tell you? Since we are exchanging confidences. Home truths . . .

"I think he is a bad influence; an *evil* influence. That shocks you! I thought it would. But you asked me why I resented him and—yes, it's true enough; I did resent

him and I do resent him. I almost didn't bring Kay down at all because I was afraid of what he would do to her . . . We always underestimate the intelligence of children, especially our own. We don't even notice how they grow physically until suddenly their clothes are too small, a shoe pinches. They are continually surprising us. Kay is at an impressionable age, an age where she is acutely receptive to new ideas. She likes Jonathan, you know. She admires him. And what children admire they copy, don't they? I didn't want her to copy *him*. I have kept her away from him as much as possible, but it's hard . . . she doesn't understand—why should she? He would make her like himself. He would make her *hard*, Gyp. He would . . . I wonder if you will understand this? He would make her laugh instead of cry. Not for falling and hurting herself or for temper or for being teased as children tease—for *pity*.

"You doubt it? You think I am exaggerating. But you are the blind one, not him. Don't you see how he laughs at you? What have you done for him?—thrown up your business, sent him to France, kept him and pandered to him and apologised for him, made excuses; slaved to make the hotel a success in the hope—such a little hope!—that it would change him. That he would 'find himself' again. Go back to his piano, making something of himself. Why should he? He doesn't want to. He will take as much as you give him and laugh at you.

"You remember I warned you against charity? What thanks has Jonathan given you? You had to *beg* Hille, didn't you, not to leave after he had been so rude to her. Do you imagine I don't know? You could hear him all over the house, shouting and storming at her. He insulted a guest—vilely. Ask yourself, Gyp, what sort of a man he is, your brother! Your precious Jonathan! At

that first dance, you remember?—when he played the piano—I warned you not to let him—and he offended everyone so much that you had to calm them down? And I had to go and talk to Jonathan in the only way he understands. And he pretended to apologise . . . sorry, Babs . . . and then he went straight on and played a piece I particularly couldn't bear to hear . . . he knew I couldn't bear it, he played it deliberately to offend me. He is like that!

"I said Kay, but it's you, Gyp, it's you I've been worried about. He leads you by the nose! Of course, I knew he would, he always did. Why should the accident change his nature? He is the same person. Accidents like that, tragedies, don't make people noble unless they're noble already. You have given up your life for him, Gyp, you have *lived* for him. His influence over you is more than a brother's, it's . . . unhealthy.

"He is blind, yes, I am sorry he's blind. You have always said we owe him so much. It's true, we owe him a great deal, England does. But he has made of it blackmail. And you have tried to repay the debt in a false coin which he cannot use. It's true! You have helped him and helped him in a thousand ways, never understanding that he doesn't want help and doesn't need it. You have made him an invalid with your help, and he will always be an invalid until someone turns round and tells him to get on with it. Tells him to go and make a life for himself. Until someone has courage enough to call his bluff.

"Whether he himself understands this, I don't know. I think he does. Enough, at any rate, to despise you. You're not helping him—you're destroying him. And what is more you're destroying yourself."

The downs were slipping back behind them now, the

road winding narrow down to Croxton. When it became apparent that Barbara had finished, Gyp answered her, but so quietly that he was obliged to repeat the words a second time. .

"I said: 'You are very sure'."

"Yes," Barbara agreed, "I am quite sure. Because it is true."

"In part. It may be. I have done many foolish things."

Barbara touched his arm in quick sympathy, moved to see his stricken face. "The road to hell, Gyp . . . You have loved him too much."

Gyp gave her a strange look, as though he no longer recognised her.

"No," he said. "You are very acute, Barbara, but you make mistakes like the rest of us. I have never loved Jonathan. I have hated him, *hated* him. Always."

It was not until he had left Barbara at the gates of Kay's school and driven into the town with Elizabeth's weekly shopping list, that Gyp remembered his purpose in bringing Barbara with him. He had meant to talk to her about Shaun.

But then, on the return journey when he was driving her back to Sagastrand, he found that there was little to say. Once, not very long ago, he would have reproached her bitterly for her conduct. It was not that his personal convictions had slackened or altered, he had still accepted no comfortable euphemism for the old-fashioned name of sin. It was only that he had learned, somewhere since, that there are not seven deadly sins but a hundred and seven; and that the greatest of these is an uncharitableness of spirit.

WHEN they returned to Sagastrand, Hugh Connor's car was standing under the porch.

He had been waiting for more than an hour in the office, Elizabeth told them. "I asked him to come into the drawing-room—there's a fire in there—but he wouldn't." She seemed at a loss to account for this incivility, and offered an apology for him. "He's had a long drive down. I expect he's tired."

Gyp's hand closed on Barbara's arm, but he said nothing.

"Well . . ." Elizabeth said. "Aren't you going in?"

Though it was still afternoon, the days were short now and the office, with its small leaded windows half screened by the lowest branches of the evergreens, received little of the fading daylight into its panelled interior. Its corners were thickened with shadows, the line of mantelpiece and furniture softened and indistinct. Hugh was deep in an armchair whose high-winged back screened his face, and so still that Barbara thought he slept. But at the sound of the door closing behind her he moved a little and said: "Babs?"

"Yes . . . I'm sorry you've had to wait so long."

"Yes," he said, and she was sure now that Elizabeth was right. His voice was very tired and faint, as if he awoke from a dream and confused the dream still with the awakening. "It's been a long time." Seeming to arouse himself he sat up a little in his chair and turned

to look at her so that instinctively she flinched, but she could still not see his face well. He said: "Didn't you expect me?"

"No—— Did you phone? No one told me."

She saw that he shook his head slowly, still with the heaviness of sleep upon him, as if puzzled, as if they were talking at cross-purposes and he must begin again, and very carefully.

"Your sister wrote to me," he said.

"I know."

"Yes . . . I've spoken to her. Just now. She told me you knew all about it. It was a despicable thing to do. Writing a letter like that."

"It was a foolish impulse. She is very young."

"I have always liked Penelope."

"She has always liked you."

"Is that so? How odd, though, the way we behave towards those we like most. I always used to think there was something entirely wholesome about Penelope. I would have said she didn't have an atom of meanness or vice in her. She always seemed so outspoken and so fresh and full of life somehow. I couldn't have believed her capable of an underhand thing like this."

Barbara said: "She signed the letter?"

He was startled. "Yes, of course . . . ah! I see what you mean. How funny you are. You are defending her. She did it for revenge, I suppose."

"No. She did it"—Barbara hesitated, and forced herself to continue—"to protect you."

"From you?"

"If you like. From me."

Barbara had the feeling that he was watching her intently, searching her face. But she could not be sure.

"Tell me," he said at last. "Tell me something, Babs."

If your sister hadn't written about this Shaun . . . would you have told me?"

• He said again: "Would you?"

"No."

"Never?"

"Never."

He smiled, she was sure that he smiled, He said: "Thanks, Babs. It would have been easy, wouldn't it, to have lied. Come here."

She moved towards him, forgetful that she was obliged by nothing to do so; from habit only. He reached up and took her by the wrist, but so lightly that she could easily have moved away scarcely hindered by the touch. "You will hear no more from Shaun," he said. "Penelope in her letter mentioned his club, and I went along and had a chat with him."

He drew her, by her wrist, down, so that now she sat on the arm of his chair and close to him; and he was laughing now at her astonishment. Disbelieving him, uncertain, she said: "Just like that?"

It was his left hand that held her wrist; now he lifted his right, and she saw that from the first knuckle of the fingers to beyond the wrist it was encased in plaster.

"*Hugh!*——"

The incongruity of it—for he had no claim on her, none—struck her so forcibly that she burst out laughing, slipping helplessly from the arm of his chair and across, and his broken hand in its plaster cast was like a rock in the small of her back, supporting her. His mouth on hers ended her laughter, and she felt, then, the salt of her own tears on his cheek.

But still in her heart she went on laughing, as though she would laugh for ever. •

"They have gone out," Penelope told Gyp.

She was sitting sideways in an armchair close by the fire in the drawing-room, her legs swinging over the arm, her head back against a cushion. Her eyes were half closed, and she was smiling at some thought of her own. A book lay on the floor where it had fallen, the pages sadly crumpled, beside one small moccasin shoe. Gyp picked up the book and put it on the table beside her chair. The shoe he replaced on her dangling bare foot.

"Thank you," she said absently. "Do you think they will get married all over again?"

Gyp looked down at her and smiled. Her hair was loose over the cushion, sliding, when she shifted her head a little, in heavy tresses that seemed to change colour, catching the light from the standard-lamp behind her. Her dark eyebrows were puckered up in an expression of gravity absurdly in contrast with her young face.

"Can they," she asked him seriously, "marry again? After being divorced."

"They can."

"Then I think they will," Penelope decided. "I was talking to Hugh, you know. He said something about finding her again. He said he was going to ask her to forgive him. That's silly, isn't it? I mean, you'd think *he* would have to forgive *her*."

"Not necessarily," Gyp said. And because he did not want to answer the next question which he could almost watch her formulating, he said: "And talking of getting married, I haven't seen young Roussell here for some time."

Penelope sighed. "Poor Dennis. He did ask me, you know. I said I'd think about it. But I shan't, really. I know I don't love him enough." She sat up and frowned into the fire. "The truth is I don't think I want to marry

anyone. Not yet, Gyp, I'm having too much fun! I love this house and all the people. I adore living in a hotel all the time. But it's not only that. When I marry I want to be *sure*. I think that's terribly important, don't you?"

"Yes," Gyp agreed. "I'm sure it is."

This dubious answer puzzled her; then she laughed aloud. "Of course! You've never been married either! Dear old Gyp—I do talk, don't I! Here am I asking you all sorts of questions! I don't suppose you know much more about it than I do, really."

"I don't suppose so," Gyp agreed.

"And another thing," Penelope continued, "is that I shouldn't like to leave Jon in the lurch. He'd get in an awful mess without me. I know exactly where all his clothes are, and what he likes to read, and how to manage him when he's cross . . . Still, he'll have to manage without me soon enough. He'll be the next one to get married, won't he. Have you seen her, Gyp? She's stunningly beautiful— isn't it funny? Well, not funny. Odd. I mean Jonathan——"

"Yes," Gyp said. "I know what you mean."

IN April Barbara and Hugh Connor were married for the second time, without formality, at the registry office in Croxton. Gyp alone of the Paris family was present. The couple were to spend their second honeymoon in the south of France, this being, Hugh explained, where they would have spent their first had the war not prevented it, and allowed them instead forty-eight hours in Liverpool. Afterwards they would return to Hugh's flat in Wimbledon, and perhaps later they would look for a small house. Kay meanwhile would remain at the Croxton school, and Gyp's suggestion that she should continue to spend her week-ends at Sagastrand was readily accepted.

There were few changes necessary in the organisation of the hotel. Penelope assumed the responsibility for the accounts with Gyp's assistance, and later without it, surprising him by her competence; they advertised for an experienced receptionist and had no difficulty in finding one.

By the middle of April Barbara was gone; and by the beginning of May, Jonathan also.

He gave some brief explanation. He told Gyp that he proposed taking up the piano again and that he had heard of a good man in London. A friend had written offering accommodation in the city. Penelope, who had read the letter to him, confirmed this. Jonathan talked a great deal about a method of listening to another pianist in the same room and repeating the music by

ear, which, he said, was infinitely preferable to braille scores; but he said very little about his future plans, except that he did not know when he would be back. How will you manage? Gyp asked him, meaning for money, and would have offered any assistance he required, but Jonathan answered shortly that he had his pension and would manage very well. And remembering something of what Barbara had told him, Gyp was silent.

Penelope would have accompanied Jonathan to London, but this, too, he refused. They ascertained the times of the train, and Jonathan telephoned his London friends, who would meet him. Gyp drove him to Croyton station and saw him on the train with his baggage, and clasped his hand. And Jonathan was gone. All of them—Elizabeth, Penelope, Gyp—though they said nothing to one another, knew that he would not return to Sagastrand.

Two weeks later a letter came saying that he was marrying Lucia Cromwell, and giving the date of the wedding. It was typed and addressed to them all. Elizabeth read it aloud at the breakfast table. She read it through with many pauses, with mounting astonishment.

“Lucia Cromwell!” she cried. “Why, that’s——”

It came to her with a sudden shock of unreality that the letter had aroused no comment at all. She looked from Gyp to Penelope in bewilderment, wondering whether it was not some abstruse family joke that she herself was too stupid to see, hoping that someone would explain. But no one did. Gyp continued with his breakfast as if Jonathan’s wedding was the most ordinary occurrence in the world. Penelope, catching her eye, burst out laughing with her mouth full and

went into a paroxysm of coughing that brought tears to her eyes. When she could speak she cried out: "Oh, Liza! Didn't you *guess*? She's been here dozens of times. Jon was always going off with her!"

"The blonde girl?" Elizabeth said. "But I never realised that was Lucia Cromwell! Jon never said anything!" She looked at the letter again for a new meaning. "It's all such a bombshell! They're getting married on Friday . . . Why, that's *today*!"

Penelope was surprised, then. "Well, that's a bit thick," she said. "Now nobody can go!" She appealed to Gyp: "Oh, I think that's rotten of him!"

"But you knew they were getting married?" Elizabeth persisted.

Gyp, transferring a thin triangle of toast from a silver rack to his plate, paused. "No," he said. "We didn't know."

"But we guessed," Penelope explained. "We guessed ages ago—didn't we, Gyp?"

"Yes. We did guess."

But we didn't know.

The grasses up to the downs were yellow with buttercups, red and white with clover, blue with the wild Veronica. In a coppice there he found bluebells in deep profusion, and the poisonous yellow-leaved wood sorrel. Higher up and in the open he came upon the triple-coloured wild violet, purple and yellow and blue, and he laughed because he remembered that it was called heartsease. Horsetail and meadow-grass brushed by him, the pretty orange butterfly hovering among them; a brown lark went up from the grasses at his feet into the sky and paused there far above, singing its one sweet

trill. All the earth seemed to have leaped into vivid colours, opening to the sun, eager with the pulse of life. May, it was May. The merry month.

He climbed to the highest point of the downs, where in the snow the children had come tobogganing; and from this point he could make out the road, the wide road curling right, where first he had encountered her, the scarlet coat swinging free as she walked. From this point too he could see the far line of the coast and the cove where he had driven with her and they had sat on the sea-wall, as though, from where he stood, he could gather all that was ever between them into the compass of his hand, it was so little.

In your dream did I kiss you?

The flash of silver in the waves, a fish perhaps; and the marble-softness of her small features, the golden-spun hair, her darling mouth curling to laughter; or her brown eyes laughing, peeping at him over the mask of her coat collar; isn't this fun, Gyp?

And he heard her voice again telling him that she would marry the first man who made her an offer: I'm sick of this, Gyp, sick of it.

He threw himself down in the grass, face down, shutting out the sight and the sound of her; shutting out the world of colour for the close green texture of the grass-blades, cool against his face. But this, too, was unbearable, the song of the lark drew his eyes up, and he found the lark again as a dark speck against the blue, climbing tiny into the sky overhead. And it seemed to him that all the doubts and uncertainties that tortured him, all the pity and the contradictions, might be voiced in the single question—*why?* And he suddenly raised himself and shouted it, and heard it go up on the wind, a cry ascending with the lark into heaven itself; growing

fainter and smaller until cry and lark both were lost to him.

Not for her ; it was not for her that he cried, but for something infinitely precious glimpsed and lost that had slipped, not from him only, but out of the world for ever. Though he knew with a sick certainty that she would never know happiness with Jonathan and would never stay with him, he knew already that the Lucia who at this moment perhaps was married to his brother was a stranger to him ; just as Jonathan would never find the child again who had sat with him on the seawall and laughed to see a fish in the waves. This consolation remained to him only in bitterness : the certain knowledge that he was justified ; that they would never be happy, either of them.

Much later, when he was returning to the hotel and was already at the end of the carriage-way, the answer came back to him.

He went on into the house and looked in the register to see if there were any new names, and found a note in Penelope's handwriting reminding him that a faulty lock on the door of one of the guest-rooms needed attention. He fetched a screw-driver from the back of the house and went upstairs, past the window with the family crest. For a moment he paused there, his eyes closed, his lips moving in a simple prayer : Oh, God, if it be possible, grant that they may be very, very happy.

And opening his eyes again he saw the lettering in the glass : *resurgam, resurgam*.